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The Wishing Ring Man

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He was fairly content with what he s

THE WISHING-RING MAN

BY

MARGARET WIDDEMER

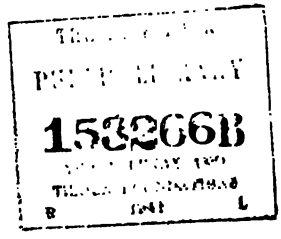
Author of "The Rose-Garden Husband" and "Why Not?"

FRONTISPIECE BY WILLY POGANY

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1917



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Published September, 1917

THE QUINN & BODEN CO. PRESS
RAHWAY, N. J.

TO THE MEMORY OF
MY OWN GRANDFATHER

E. S. W.

ONE OF THE DEAREST, BEST AND
KINDLIEST OF MEN

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THE WISHING-RING MAN

CHAPTER ONE

JOY IN AMBER SATIN

JOY HAVENITH had no business at all to be curled up on the back stairs under Great-Grand-Aunt Lucilla's picture. She ought to have been sliding sweetly up and down the long double parlors with teacups and cake, and she knew it. But she just didn't care.

As a matter of fact, Aunt Lucilla and the other ancestors ought to have been in the parlors, too; but Grandfather had ordained differently. He had gobbled the parlor walls for his autographed photograph collection, and Grandmother, long before Joy was born or orphaned, had sorrowfully hung her ancestors-in-law out in the long, narrow hall, where they were a tight fit. Grandfather was one of the last survivors of the old school of American poetry. He was tall and slender, and very gentle and nice, but he always had things the way he said he wanted them, and he preferred his autographed friends to his family portraits.

"It's rather a good thing it's so dark out here, Aunt

Lucilla," said Joy to the smiling Colonial lady in the dark corner above her. "You mayn't much like being where people can't see you—but think how you'd feel, up garret!"

Aunt Lucilla Havenith, red of lip, flashing of eye, blue and silver of gown, laughed on down at her great-grand-niece, who was holding a surreptitious little red candle up to talk to her. Aunt Lucilla, from all accounts, had had too excellent a time in her life to mind a little thing like being put in a back hall afterwards. She had been a belle from her fifteenth year, eloped with her true-love at sixteen, and gone on being a belle all the rest of her life, in the intervals of three husbands and ever so many children. She had managed everything and everybody she came across gaily al her life; she had been proposed to by practically the whole Society of the Cincinnati; and had died at eighty-three, a power and a charmer to the last.

"I don't think you need to mind dark corners one bit," said Joy, tipping the candle so that the red wax dribbled down on her slim fingers. "If Rochambeau and Lafayette and all the rest of the people in the history-books had made a fuss over *me*——"

Joy sat down on the stairs again, on a cushion. Nobody used the back stairs, fine curly ones that they were, and Joy's cushion, which she had put there on purpose to be mournful on a fortnight before, was untouched since last time.

Joy Havenith was nineteen, but you never would have known it. She had been told so often by her grandparents that she was only a child yet, that she quite believed it. No, not quite—but enough to make her a little shy, and have almost the expression and manner still of a little girl. She had big, black-lashed, kitten-blue eyes, scarlet lips, and two ropes of bronze hair that she wanted very badly to put up. It sounds like rather an exciting personality, but Joy was so young and so shy and so obedient that she was only like a rather small Blessed Damozel, or some other not-grown-up Rossetti person. She knew it well, because she had been told so frequently, and she didn't care about it at all. She leaned her head against the frame containing Great-Grandfather John Havenith at twenty, and considered Aunt Lucilla afresh.

"*All* the people in the history-books!" she said again softly, but none the less regretfully.

Ordinarily you couldn't ask for a dearer, sweeter child than Joy, slipping noiselessly up and down the old house in the city, being just as good as she knew how. She had always been told that she must be good and obedient and affectionate, and it had never been any trouble to her, because she was naturally that way. She lived all alone with Grandfather and Grandmother and Elizabeth the cook, and did just what Grandfather told her to. So did everybody else. It wasn't that he was cross, or anything like that. He was more charm-

ing than most people. But he was a Personage; and if you live with a Personage your own personality gets a bit pushed into the background, without its being anybody's fault at all.

Joy had been perfectly happy, as far as she knew, until two weeks before. You can be, you know, if no one tells you you aren't, especially when you're young.

Grandfather had Afternoons every two weeks, when he sat at the end of the parlors in a big chair and received his admirers. In his youth he had looked like Shelley, and he was still tall and slender and clean-shaven, with straight, abundant white hair, and black brows and lashes like Joy's. And he had what is called immense personal charm, and loved his little granddaughter devotedly. He simply didn't know she was grown up. For the matter of that, neither did Joy herself until . . .

You see, it had been very much like life in a fairy-book. She never remembered anything but the old house and the old people, and everybody literary coming and going and telling her how wonderful Grandfather was: and nothing that concerned *her* very closely, at all. She scarcely knew how to treat anybody, except respectfully, because they had always all been so much older than she was. It was like living in an enchanted tower. Enchanted towers are very pleasant places, because you can have all sorts of

dreams in them. Joy hadn't missed anything much, till the thing that happened at the reception.

Grandfather, in his frock-coat and stock, his white fluffy hair flying, had been moving up and down the autographed parlors with his usual dominant charm. Little gray Grandmother, in her gathered, fichued black silk, was putting lemon or cream in teacups, as people should prefer. Joy had been walking up and down by Grandfather, as he liked to have her on reception days. They dressed her, on these days, in lovely strange frocks, cut medieval fashion, with the ropes of bronze-gold hair trailing down either side of her vividly colored, incongruously dreamy little face. According to the way Joy figured it out, Grandfather had her dress that way, the better to write poetry about her. She didn't mind. The truth was, she lived so far inside herself that she didn't care. It was so much easier to do quickly what you were told, and then go back to the place where you played by yourself—a fairy country.

This particular reception day was a damp, heavily hot afternoon in early September. There weren't many people back in the city yet, but Grandfather always began his " days " as early as he could. He was fond of having people around him. And even on this very sticky day people did come. Only two of them were young.

Joy didn't know any young people. Some day she

intended to. In her dream-world she had friends who were young and gay and lovely and talked to her, and to whom she talked back gaily; but it never occurred to her to expect anything like that to really happen right now. The young men and young girls she sometimes crossed she admired quite happily and remotely, as if they were people from another planet.

It was so that she watched these two people that were young. She liked watching them so much that presently she escaped from Grandfather, and slid behind the window-curtains, to be closer to them.

"They feel so lovely and happy," said Joy, warming her little hands at their happiness.

They were lovers; anybody could see that. And they weren't poets or anything of the sort; you could see that, too. *She* was in a little trim white pongee street suit, with a close little hat above a little rosy, powdered, cheerful face. *He* had rather heavy shoulders and a shock of carefully brushed straight light hair, and looked about one year out of Harvard. They didn't at all belong with the middle-aged roomful. As a matter of fact, *her* mother knew Mrs. Havenith a little, and so they had dashed in here to save her suit from the rain. They were sitting and smiling at each other against a background of Mark Twain's life-sized head in a broad gilt frame. They faced another life-sized head of Browning, also autographed, but they liked looking at each other better.

Joy, from her hiding-place, could feel the current of their happiness and youth, and it made her very warm in her soul, and comfortable. She listened to them quite unashamedly, as she would have to a nice play.

"She has wonderful hair, hasn't she?" she heard the girl say.

"Not as lovely as my girl's," the man answered softly.

His girl laughed, a little low pleased laugh. "But you can't see mine hanging down that way, like a picture," she fenced.

"I'm glad you don't wear it that way," he insisted. "I like you to look like a real girl, not a movie star or an advertisement."

"Do you suppose she likes it?" asked the girl. "I'd go crazy if I had to be like that—why, she isn't as old as I am! I suppose they write poems about her, though," she added, as if that might be a compensation.

"Oh, if *that's* all—" began the man, and they both laughed happily, as at a wonderful joke.

Joy, frozen behind her curtains, heard a little rustle, as if he was taking her hand, and her protest—

"Oh, Dicky, don't—they'll see us!"

"Not a bit," said he cheerfully. "They're all looking at dear Grandpapa, the Angora Poet [illegible] idest in captivity to be reading his own [illegible]

about the little girl, poor kid—he seems to be looking around for her."

"Sonnets? Oh, let's go; the rain's stopped," whispered the girl. "You were awfully extravagant this afternoon. Now we're going to take a nice, inexpensive walk up home."

She heard him protesting a little at that; then they slid out softly, while poor Joy sat behind her curtains, moveless and aghast. . . . Oh, was this what she was like . . . to real, happy, gay people her own age? And she had liked the girl so, and been so glad she had her lover, and that they loved each other! And Grandfather . . . She had never thought whether he wrote poetry about her or not. She had just taken it for granted. People had to write about something, and it was just as apt to be you as a public crisis or a sunset, or anything else useful for the purpose. But they had *laughed* about it. . . . Oh, she did hope it wouldn't be a poem about her that he was going to read! She felt she couldn't stand it, if it were. She knew that when she was the subject she was expected to be in sight, as a sort of outward and visible sign.

"I won't go out into the room!" she said defiantly. "He doesn't expect the sunsets and public crises to stand up and be looked at when he reads about them!"

So she stayed just where she was. As she stayed, incongruously, a joke out of an old Punch came into

her head—not at all an esthetic one. It was a picture of a furious woman brandishing a broom, while the tips of her husband's boots showed under the bed-foot. The husband was saying: "Ye may poke at me and ye may threaten me, but ye canna break my manly sperrit. I willna come out fra under the bed!"

Joy laughed a little, even in her sad state of mind, at the remembrance. "I willna come out fra under the bed, either," she decided rather shakily, curling her flowing yellow satin closer about her, and making herself quite flat against the window-frame. She tried to stop her ears and not listen, so she wouldn't know whether the poetry was about her or not. But she had fatally sharp ears, and Grandfather always practised on her and Grandmother, adoringly silent at the breakfast table. She would know the poems apart if she only caught a half word. . . . And it *was* about her.

Grandfather's beautiful voice carried as well as it ever had. No matter how many fingers you had in how many ears, you heard it just the same. And the poem's name was, "To Joy in Amber Satin."

It was doubtless a very lovely poem, and she'd been as pleased as anybody when it had sold to the *Century* for fifty dollars last week. But it suddenly came over Joy that she wasn't a crisis, nor yet a sunset, and that people oughtn't to write poetry to their granddaughters, and then have them wear the clothes that were

written about right in the room with the poem. She knew, too, that as soon as it was over, purry, nice, prettily dressed ladies would come and hunt her out and use admiring adjectives on her. She had never minded it before; she had taken it as a well-behaved little dog would; as a curious thing people did, which meant that they wanted to be nice. With this new viewpoint drenching her like cold water it didn't seem nice a bit.

She pulled the curtain stealthily apart and peeped out. Everything seemed fairly all right. Between her and Grandfather, a useful shelter, spread the massive purple-velvet back of Mrs. Harmsworth-Jones, who always came, and always asked afterwards, "And how is our little Joy-Flower today?" She was as good as she could be, but she was one more of the things Joy felt as if she couldn't stand right now.

She tiptoed very carefully indeed past Mrs. Harmsworth-Jones, and past Grandfather's bronze bust at twenty-five, and almost past the framed autograph letter of Whittier, on the easel. That was as far as she got, because there was a nail sticking out at the side of the Whittier frame, and it caught her by one of the straps that held her satin panels together across the violet chiffon sidepieces. The framed letter came down with a clatter, spoiling the last line of the poem forever; and Joy was caught, for of course every one turned around to see what the noise was.

Grandfather, who had great presence of mind, read the last four lines of the poem over again slowly, directly at Joy, who stood like a wistful little figure out of Fairyland, pressed back against the easel; her frightened eyes wide, her golden-bronze braids glimmering in the firelight. It seemed to her that the delivery of those last four lines was endless.

Yet they were done at last, and still Joy stood motionless. She really did not know how to run away, because she had never done it.

Before she moved Grandfather had finished his reading and the people, who had been sitting and standing raptly about, began to move; all fluttering dresses and perfumes, and little laughters, and pleasant little speeches to each other. It was a part of the reception that Joy usually looked forward to happily. She was just pulling herself together for flight when Mrs. Harmsworth-Jones, jingling, purple-upholstered and smiling, bore down on her.

"How is our dear little Joy-Flower this afternoon?" she asked as inevitably as Fate, patting Joy's slim bare arm with one plump, gloved hand, and beaming. "Oh, dearest child, *do* you realize the privilege you have? Think of actually living so close to a poet that you become a part of his inspiration. Dear little Joy——"

Mrs. Harmsworth-Jones was one of the nicest, kindest, fattest [illegible] that ever lived, and further-

more, she had taken Joy, all by herself, to a performance of "Pelleas and Melisande" only the spring before. And though Joy had thought privately that the people sang too long at a time on one note, and wished Melisande was less athletic-looking, she had liked it very much, and felt obliged to the lady ever since. So she really shouldn't have behaved the way she did—if it hadn't been for the lovers, she doubtless wouldn't have. As it was, she braced herself against the easel.

"It isn't a privilege a bit," she said defiantly, out of a clear sky. "It isn't half as much fun as being the kind of girl everybody else is. I hate wearing moving-picture clothes" [not even in her excitement could Joy bring herself to say "movies"] "and I hate never knowing girls and men my own age, and I hate having poems written to me worse than anything at *all!*"

Poor Mrs. Harmsworth-Jones! She hadn't done a thing. Her own girls went to fashionable schools and attended sub-deb dances by the score until they came out, which they did at eighteen each like clockwork. She couldn't have been expected to see to it for somebody else's girl, too. Her getting the full blast of it was a quite fortuitous affair, and Joy always felt, looking back afterwards on her explosion, that it had been hard on the lady—who was frightened by it to the point of silence. It must have been very

much as if the sedate full-length of Mr. Shakspere, over in the corner and *not* autographed, had opened its mouth and begun to recite limericks.

"Why—why!" she said; and that was all she was capable of saying for the moment. Joy, terrified herself at her deed, turned and fled.

What happened between Mrs. Jones and Grandfather she never knew, and never asked. She never halted in her flight till she was safe in her own little eyrie upstairs.

There she stopped before her dresser mirror, and looked at the flushed, breathless girl in the glass.

"I wonder," Joy said aloud, "what really is the difference between me and other people?"

She stared into the glass to see if she couldn't find out, leaning her hands down on the dresser-top. But the pretty white-enamel-framed mirror showed her just the same Joy as ever. Her heavy bronze-gold braids swung forward, and their ends coiled down on the dresser-top. Between them her little pointed face looked straight at her, blue-eyed, red-lipped, and serious. Its owner eyed it perplexedly awhile, then gave up the riddle.

"If you look like pictures and poetry you *do,* and that's all there is to it. I suppose living with Grandfather's had an effect on me . . . I wonder . . ." Joy still stared steadily into the glass—"I wonder if having somebody in love with me would make a dif-

ference. It's the only thing Grandfather's ever said he was willing to have happen to me. He's always talking about 'I would give you up willingly to the first breath of true love. . . .' But there's never anybody comes to his parties you could love with a pair of tongs . . . I wonder if he *would?* It would have to be love at first sight, too, I suppose. He doesn't think much of any other kind of love. . . . But I'd be dreadfully frightened of him . . . I hope he'd have blond curly hair!"

She lifted herself from her leaning position, and went and curled up on the side of the bed, the better to think.

"There's no use wondering about a lover," she decided. "Lovers *never* come to hear Grandfather read, not unless they come in pairs to get out of the rain, like the animals in the ark. . . . Anyway I don't think I'd want the one today, even if he hadn't been a pair. But a nice fresh one that didn't belong to anybody else . . ."

Grandmother, released at last from finding out what people wanted in their tea, and giving it to them, hurried into the room at this point, and was very much relieved to find Joy perfectly well to all appearances, and sitting quietly on the side of the bed gazing off into space.

"Darling, were you ill?" she panted, sitting down by her. "Your grandfather was quite disturbed over

it, and I was terribly frightened. We knew something must have happened. What was it, lambie? Where do you feel badly?"

Joy looked away from the wall, at her grandmother's kind, anxious, wrinkled little face under the lace lappets. Grandfather liked Grandmother to wear caps, so she did it; also fichus and full-skirted silks, whether such were in fashion or no.

"I didn't feel ill one bit," explained Joy deliberately. "Only I'm tired of being a decoration. I want to be like other people . . . I don't want to wear any more clothes like paintings, or ever have any more poetry written to me. I—oh, Grandmother, everything's going on and going on, and none of it's happening to *me!*" She looked at her grandmother appealingly. "And it feels as if it wouldn't ever!"

But Grandmother didn't seem to understand a bit. And yet she must have been young once—wasn't there that poem of Grandfather's, "To Myrtilla at Seventeen," to prove it? The one beginning "Sweetheart, whose shadowed hair!" Why, he must have—yes, he spoke of it in the poem—Grandfather must have held Grandmother's hand, like the Dicky-lover today, and even kissed her because he wanted to, not because it was nine in the morning or ten at night. Those were the times he kissed her now. Of one thing Joy was certain, Grandmother had never told Grandfather he must stop. She wouldn't have dared.

"Dear, would you like a hot-water bottle, and your supper in bed?" inquired Grandmother, breaking in on these meditations. . . . Oh, it was a long time since Grandmother had been Myrtilla at seventeen! Joy looked at her wistfully once more.

"No, thank you, Grandmother," she said decidedly. "I feel very well, thank you. I'll be down to supper as soon as I've changed my frock."

She felt as if getting off the actual clothes that were in the poem would be escaping from it a little, and perhaps drawing a little nearer the having of real things happen to her. Grandmother, nearly reassured, patted Joy's little slim hand with her own little wrinkled one, and trotted downstairs to tell Grandfather happily that Joy would soon be down.

Joy, left alone, pulled off the amber robe, and stood before the wardrobe in her silk slip, pushing along the hangers to try and find something practical. It was pretty hard. All her gowns were lovely loose or draped or girdled things: you could have costumed the whole cast of two Maeterlinck plays from just those hangers. She was very tired, suddenly, of all of them. At last she found a green dress that was the delight of her life, even if it was picturesque, because it was such a nice, cheerful color, put it on, and went down. She had tried to fasten her hair up as the lover-girl's had been fastened, but hers was so curly and heavy and alive and long that it couldn't be done. She

strapped it in desperation around her head, wished she had some powder, and dashed down the long flights of stairs just in time to save herself from a second summons. She wasn't quite satisfied with her own general effect, but it would do for a beginning.

So, dreamer as she still was, nevertheless the only thing alight and alive in the old house, she ran down the staircases, past the statues that stood severely in the niches at the head of each flight, down finally to the basement dining-room where the three old people, her grandfather and grandmother and old Elizabeth, were waiting for her.

They sat at either end of the old mahogany table—that had been Lucilla Havenith's, too—with supper, plus the sandwiches left over from the tea, waiting untouched till Joy should come. By the way all three stopped short when she came in, Joy was sure they had been wondering what was the matter with her. She sank into her own chair, and took one of the walnut sandwiches which had been spared by the reception people. She was still hungry, and proceeded to eat it, at which Mrs. and Mr. Havenith looked happier.

"You see, Alton, she has an appetite," said Grandmother thankfully.

"Yes, I am glad to see she has," answered Grandfather, as if the circumstance was gratifying to him also. "I am very much relieved."

Joy felt guilty. When your grandparents were as

fond as all that of you, you really hadn't any right to feel as if you wanted anything else. She straightened up and smiled gallantly at them, and took another sandwich by way of proving her health.

"I think I'm all right," she said.

"You were overtired," said Grandmother solicitously—Grandmother, who had cut all the sandwiches, which Joy had only buttered! "The day's been oppressive."

So she passed Joy some more of the walnut sandwiches, and smiled to see that they were being eaten.

"But I am not satisfied, yet," said Grandfather. If Grandfather had only let well enough—and young girls' whimsies—alone, Joy wouldn't have been tempted. "What made you rush out that way, Joy—just as I was finishing the last stanza of the lyric, 'To Joy in Amber Satin,' too? You couldn't have chosen a worse possible moment. You nearly spoiled the effect."

Joy threw her head back defiantly. She knew that if Grandmother didn't understand her appeal, certainly Grandfather wouldn't.

"Grandfather," she said, "do you remember the anecdote you always tell to small groups of people, the one about the farmer who used to meet your friend, James Russell Lowell, on his afternoon walk every day, and say, 'Waal, Mr. Lowell, had a poem yet today?' *I* had a poem!"

It was a most amazing fish story. Joy hadn't had any such thing as a poem: nothing at all but a fit of rebellion. But if she wanted to check her grandfather's inquiries she had taken the most perfect way known to civilization. He couldn't possibly blame her for bolting if the poem had to be put down. Nor even for being impolite to Mrs. Harmsworth-Jones.

"You always say, 'The Muse must out,'" continued Joy defiantly. "Or would you rather I didn't have any Muse?"

There was only one thing for Grandfather to say, and he said it.

"My dear, if you are really intending to do serious work along that line nothing should prevent you. I quite understand."

Grandmother looked over at her little girl with a new respect—and perhaps a new apprehension. One poet in a family is supposed to be enough, as a rule. And Joy had always been such a good, dear child to manage.

So no more was said. But Joy wondered if she hadn't let herself in for something dreadful. Grandfather would certainly expect to see that poem some day!

Nothing more was said about it for the two weeks that led to Grandfather's next Afternoon. Joy was delighted to find that her Muse wasn't asked for, and her grandparents may have been rather pleased at her

continuing to behave as she always had, instead of saying curious things about wanting to be like other people. She continued to wear her picture-frocks and do as she was told. Her own feelings were that she had been naughty, but that she was rather glad of it.

And so it was that when the reception day came around again, Joy helped with the sandwiches and sliced the lemons and piled up the little cakes and dressed herself prettily—and then went and hid at the foot of the back stairs, with Aunt Lucilla for a companion.

"I hope I shall behave if somebody finds me, and tells me what a privilege it is to be me," said Joy; "but I doubt it. Because it isn't. It isn't one bit."

"What isn't?" demanded a man's voice interestedly.

CHAPTER TWO

BY GRACE OF THE WISHING RING

Joy turned her head to look. She was quite sure that the speaker couldn't see her very well, but she could see him, or the top of him, perfectly, because he was standing in the crack of a door that gave on to the back hall; a door few people remembered existed, as a picture hung on it, and it gave no impression of ever being used. He was young and broad-shouldered and sure-looking, little as she could see of him. She could see his face as far down as the eyes, and that was all. They were pleasant, steel-colored eyes, very amused and direct, and his hair, in the light of the old-fashioned chandelier behind him, glittered, fair and a little curlier than he evidently approved of.

He slipped entirely through the door; at the same moment Joy blew out the candle she had been holding up to Aunt Lucilla. Then she laughed, a little shy, pretty laugh. She wished she could light it again, to look at him, but she remembered that if she did that he might think she *did* want to look at him.

"I'm so glad you've come!" she almost said. He seemed like some one she had been waiting for a long

while, some way, instead of the usual stranger you had to get used to. There was such a breath of freshness and courage and cheer in just the few words he had spoken and the little laugh they were borne on, that Joy felt irrationally what a nice world it was. Then she remembered to reply to what he had said.

"It isn't a privilege, being me," she explained from her shadows.

He looked over to where her voice came from, but there wasn't anything visible except a little dark heap on the last three stairs.

"I could tell better if I could see you," he stated pleasantly. "Don't you want to take the hint?"

But Joy, mindful of the hanging braids that would certainly make him think she was a little girl, would not take it at all. She snuggled against the wall.

"Oh, you can see me any time," she said carelessly, "but you can scarcely ever get to talk to me. At least, I heard somebody say so last month."

She felt quite like somebody else, a gay, teasing, careless sort of real girl, talking to him here in the dark. She was sure she wouldn't if the lights were on. She could talk to him as if he were some one out of a book or a story, so long as he didn't know she looked like a book-person or a play-person herself.

"Well, anyway, do let me stay here," he begged, doing it. "For the last hour I haven't felt as if it was much of a privilege to be me, either. Do you know

that feeling of terrible personal unworthiness you get at a party where everybody knows everybody else and nobody knows you? I feel like precisely the kind of long, wiggly worm the little boy ate."

Joy felt very sorry for him; because if she didn't know that feeling she knew one to match it; having everybody know her and nobody think of playing with her. . . . This man was playing with her for a minute, anyway.

"And I'll always have him to remember," she thought happily, "even when I'm an old, old lady, writing reminiscences of Grandfather, the way they all say I should . . ." She went off into a little day-dream of writing all this down in her reminiscences, and having him—old, too, then—write back to her and say that he, also, had always remembered the time happily, and wondered who she was. . . . Then she answered him.

"You know me, anyway—don't say you know no one," she told him. "Anyway, I'm glad you're talking to me. I'm Joy."

He laughed again, leaning against the door-frame in the thread of light.

"Then you're something I've been looking for a long time," he said. "I've had friends and success, and good times—but I've never found Joy till now."

She knew, of course, that he was just being pleasant

about her name, as people were sometimes. But it sounded very lovely to remember.

"I'm Alton Havenith's granddaughter," she explained sedately. And, with a sudden desire that he should know the worst, she added, "I'm the one he writes poetry to."

He must have caught a note of regret in her voice—oh, he was a very wonderful person! for what he said wasn't a bit what Joy expected even him to say—the "How lovely for you!" that she was braced for.

"Why, you poor kiddie!" said he, "and you ought to be playing tag or tennis or something. I can't see much of you, except one braid that the light's on; but you're just a little thing, aren't you?"

Joy did not answer. She looked up at him, as the crack of light widened behind him, and showed him clearly for a moment. He was so very handsome, standing there with his brows contracted in a little frown over his pleasant gray eyes, that Joy felt her heart do a queer thing, as if it turned over.

He came a little nearer her, and sat down on the floor, below her, quite naturally.

"And you're awfully lonesome, and you wish something would happen?" said his kind voice. It was a lovely voice, Joy thought. It was authoritative, yet with a little caressing note in it, as if he would look after you very carefully—and you would love it.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Oh, I just could tell," he said, and it seemed a perfectly clear explanation. "Well, don't forget that there's lots of time yet. You just keep on believing things *will* happen—don't lose heart—and maybe they will."

Somehow, the way he said it, Joy was sure they would.

"Like a wishing ring?" she asked eagerly.

He laughed.

"You *are* a kiddie. Why, yes, like a wishing ring, if you like."

Before Joy could answer there came a brisk voice from the door.

"Oh, this is where you've hidden! You may be decorative, Jack, but as an escort I've known nephews more useful."

Joy looked up and saw a tiny elderly lady, quite a new one, in the doorway.

"Good-by, Joy," he said in too low a voice for the old lady to hear. "I'm glad we've met—I can't say I'm glad to have seen you, because I haven't, you know. But thanks for a human five minutes—and keep hoping."

He sprang lightly to his feet, opened the door, shut the door—was gone, and Joy was alone in the dark again.

She smiled up at Aunt Lucilla unseeingly.

"Not even Lafayette could have been as kind as

that," she said proudly, and leaned happily against the wall again.

"Why, Joy, dear, don't you want to come in and see the people?" Grandmother was asking her solicitously, bending over her. "You aren't sick again, are you?"

Joy sprang up with a little laugh.

"Not a bit," she assured her. "I'm especially all right. Why, yes—I'll come in if you want me, of course. The people don't matter."

She threaded her way, behind Grandmother, up and down the parlors for the next hour, quite happy. She'd had such a wonderful five minutes in the back hall—why, what difference did it make if Mr. James Arthur Gosport captured her and told her about his ideas on universal brotherhood? She didn't have to listen specially, because she knew just what he was going to tell: the story about how he went out from his parlor-car and hunted through the day-coach to find a brakeman, on purpose to tell him how fond he was of him. And how the brakeman's eyes filled up with tears at being loved, and how Mr. Gosport had to hurry back to his Pullman in order not to go to pieces himself.

When Mr. Gosport told this tale—it was one he used in his lectures, and it always went splendidly—Joy usually had to keep herself from wondering why he didn't go to pieces anyhow; he was so long and loosely built you'd think he was merely pinned to-

gether. But this afternoon she smiled at him so brightly that he liked the way he told the story better than ever. She was really thinking—

"The man she called Jack is built ever so much better than Mr. Gosport is. *He* wouldn't just cry over a brakeman. He'd give him some money or . . ."

"It is very wonderful to feel that we are all brothers, and that so little a thing as bringing it home to a trainhand could move him so profoundly," finished Mr. Gosport, cheered by the success of his anecdote. "I make it a point never to neglect such little things——"

He was left with a period in mid-air, for Joy, with a flurry of skirts, was running toward her grandfather. She didn't care a bit whether men were all brothers or second cousins; she thought maybe Grandfather would know the real name of the man she had talked to, the one besides Jack.

"Grandfather, what was the name of the man with curly, fair hair and big gray eyes, the one who had a little old lady with him?" she demanded breathlessly, clinging to her grandfather's arm and interrupting him ruthlessly in the middle of something he was saying to somebody.

"I haven't the faintest recollection," said Grandfather; and Grandmother whispered:

"Come away, dear. The lady with him just asked him whether he wrote under his own name or a nom-de-plume, and you know how irritating that is."

Joy came obediently away. After all, it didn't matter about Jack's other name. She knew perfectly well that she should see him again. Everything was bound to go happily. . . . And till she saw him again, she had him to remember.

"I have something pleasant to tell you, dear," said Grandmother, patting the arm she still held.

"Yes, Grandmother?" she asked, smiling. An hour or so before she would have been wild to know what it was, but now she was only serenely glad that it did exist. She knew perfectly well that things had begun to happen. And now they would go on and on and on till the fairy-tale ending came. She knew that, too. Somehow, the shut-out feeling was all gone, ever since the gray-eyed man had sat at her feet in the hall and given her the wishing ring. The curtain was up—or, rather, the door was open into things, just as he'd pushed open the door from her little dark dream-place, the door that had always been there, but nobody'd thought to use. Of course, things were going to happen—lovely ones!

"I know I'll like it," she ended, with a happy little laugh.

"You seem better already, dear," said her grandmother happily, and began: "We have been talking about your health, and we have decided that you need a change, and some young life. So we are going up to an inn in the Maine woods for a month or more.

There's boating there, and—and games, I understand, and there's a literary colony near, so there'll be people for your grandfather. He thinks he may go on holding small Afternoons. It's a cottage inn."

Joy did not know then what a cottage inn was, but neither did she care. She clasped her hands happily over the invisible wishing ring.

As Joy helped Grandmother pack, the next week, she wondered a little about clothes. She did not worry now, because she had a conviction that if she only knew what she wanted, and hoped as Jack had told her, she could hope things straight to her. There was a gray taffeta in a window uptown, together with a big gray chiffon hat, a little pair of glossy gray strapped slippers, and filmy gray silk stockings. And the hat, instead of having pink roses on it, as you'd think a normal hat would, by the mercy of Providence had deep yellow roses, exactly the color Joy knew she could wear if she got the chance. The chance, to be sure, was remote. She did not have an allowance, just money when she asked for it; and her fall wardrobe had been bought only a few weeks before. Besides the amber satin that the poetry was about, there were three other frocks, lovely, artistic, but, Joy was certain, no mortal use for tennis. She didn't know how to play tennis, but she intended to, just the same.

Now, how, with just seven dollars left from your last birthday's ten, could you buy a silk frock, with a

hat and shoes and stockings to match? The answer seemed to be that you couldn't, but Joy did not want to look at it that way yet. And as she gazed around her bedroom in search of inspiration, her eyes fell on an illuminated sentiment over her bureau. It had been sent Grandfather by a Western admirer who had done it by hand herself in three colors, not counting the gilt. Grandfather had one already, so Joy had helped herself to this, because it matched the color of her room. She had never read it before, but, reading it today, it impressed her as excellent advice to the seeker after fine raiment.

"Let the farmer," Mr. Emerson had said, "give his corn, the miner a gem, the painter his picture, the poet his poem." Joy did not stop to wonder (for the Western lady had left it out) on just what principle these contributions were being made. She didn't care.

"Now, that's the way people earn money," said she practically, and tried to think what she could do.

Cook—she could make very good things to eat, but Grandmother would have to know about that, and, besides, it wouldn't be a thing they would approve of. Sewing—no, you couldn't get much out of that. She could recite poetry and be decorative, but she gave a little shiver at the thought. She played and sang as Grandmother had taught her—harp and piano—and spoke Grandmother's French. She couldn't do much with *them*. . . . Oh, she was just decorative! And

as she prepared to be vexed at the idea, suddenly the motto caught her eye again.

"It's a perfectly impossible idea from *their* standpoint," said Joy, with the light of battle in her eye for almost the first time in her life, "but I simply have to have that gray dress."

She rose and fished the amber satin out of her trunk. She put it on, put her long coat over it, packed her next most picturesque frock in a bag, fastened on a hat, and walked out the front door.

Just three blocks away lived a dear, elderly mural decorator who was always telling her how he wished he had her for a model. She knew he was making studies now for about a half-mile of walls in a new, rich statehouse somewhere far away.

She should have been frightened at this, her first adventure, but she wasn't. She found her heart getting gayer and lighter as she ran down the steps with her little bag. It was the kind of a day when all the policemen and street-sweepers and old women selling shoe-laces look at you pleasantly, and make cheerful remarks to you. Even the conductor whose street-car she didn't take smiled pleasantly at her after stopping his car by mistake. It was as kind-hearted and pleasant-minded a worldful of people as Joy had ever met, and she was singing under her breath with happiness as she ran up the steps leading to Mr. Morrow's studio. There wasn't any particular excuse for her being so

light-hearted, excepting that the street-people had been so friendly minded, and there was such a dear little breeze with a country smoke-scent on it, and that somewhere in the world was a tall man with fair hair and a kind, authoritative voice, who had said wonderful things to her—a man she would meet again some day, when she was charming and worldly and dressed in a tailor-made suit.

Mr. and Mrs. Morrow were artists both; and she found them, blouse-swathed and disheveled, doing charcoal studies in a corner of the room apiece. Mrs. Morrow kissed Joy, arching over her so that the smudges on her pinafore wouldn't be transferred. Mr. Morrow came out of his corner and shook hands with her with less care, so that his smudges did come off on her. Then they both listened to her story with the same kindness and interest every one else had shown her that morning.

"I can sit still or stand still as long as ever you want me to," Joy explained. "And you said yourself I was decorative, Mr. Morrow; you know you did!"

"I did, indeed," Mr. Morrow answered promptly, while Mrs. Morrow asked some more questions.

Joy answered them.

"And I would be able to earn enough money for all those things in the window by Friday?" she ended.

The Morrows smiled and glanced at each other.

Joy did not know, till some months later, why they smiled. Then they spoke, nearly together.

"Yes, indeed, dear child—quite enough!"

Joy was reassured, because, though she didn't know model-prices, she had been afraid that it wouldn't be.

Then they gave her some purple draperies—the satins wouldn't do, after all, it appeared—and arranged her in them. And, to anticipate, when Joy went out to that statehouse, the next year, she was able to pick out her own bronze-gold braids and purple royalties all up and down the frieze.

"By Jove, she *is* a good model!" said Mr. Morrow after a couple of hours, pulling at his pointed gray beard and speaking enthusiastically in his soft artist-voice.

"Splendid!" said untidy, handsome Mrs. Morrow, sitting down on the model-throne to view her own work the better. "But she must be ready to drop, aren't you, Joy, dear? You aren't used to it."

But Joy shook her head.

"I'm not tired a bit," she said truthfully. "I just let go all over and stay that way. It isn't sitting any stiller than I do lots of days, when Grandfather has me stay close by him, and keep very still so he can write. Why, it seems downright sinful," she went on earnestly, "to earn beautiful gray clothes by just sitting still! But you would have to have somebody, anyway, wouldn't you?"

"Of course we would!" said Mrs. Morrow, picking up her crayon again. "Indeed, we have to have two most of the time."

They all kept very quiet for a while after that, Joy sitting still in her robes of state, a slim young Justice presiding over an as yet undrawn Senate, and the Morrows working hard at her. She had been posing for another half hour, when there came a whirlwind of steps up the stairs, and the door banged open.

"Mrs. Morrow, can you let me have some fixative?" called a voice; and Joy moved her eyes cautiously, and saw a pretty, panting girl in the doorway. She looked like an artist, too, for she had a smudge of paint on one vivid cheek, and her black hair was untidily down over her gipsy eyes.

"Nice model you've got—good skin tints—oh, don't bother about the fixative if you're working. I see it."

She darted in, past Joy, snatched a bottle half full of something yellow, and was out again before any one could speak.

"I'm hurrying," she called superfluously back as she fled to the floor below. "Giving a dance tonight."

Joy, most mousy-quiet in her chair, mentally registered another requirement toward being the kind of girl she ought to be. There were such lots of wonderful things to learn!

She went to the Morrows regularly every day after that, six days in all. She told Grandmother

where she was, not what she was doing. It didn't occur to her that Grandmother would mind, but she thought it would be pleasanter to surprise her, and say, "See the lovely dress I earned all myself, posing for the Morrows!"

Meanwhile, Grandmother, pleased at her little girl's brightened face and general happiness of demeanor, asked no questions.

"You've been one of the best models we ever had, my dear," said Mrs. Morrow in her deep, unceremonious voice, when the last day came. "And it occurred to me that you might be too hurried when the last day came to do your shopping yourself. So I just ran uptown and got your pretties for you."

It was not for a long time that Joy discovered the regular pay of a model to be fifty cents an hour, and the sum total of her gray costume to have been—it was late for summer styles, so they were marked down—fifty-three dollars and ninety cents. But Mrs. Morrow had said to Mr. Morrow, who usually saw things as she did, even before she explained them:

"Alton Havenith would never let that dear little thing have anything as modish as those clothes. He'd keep her for a living illustration to his poem-books till he died. And we're making a lot on that Sagawinna Courthouse thing. . . . And we haven't any daughter."

And Mr. Morrow, remembering a seven-year-old

with blue eyes and yellow hair, who had never grown old enough to ask for French-heeled shoes and picture hats, said only, "That's what I thought, too."

Joy, blissfully ignorant that she had been given a good deal of a present, kissed them both ecstatically on receiving a long, large pasteboard box, and almost ran home. She was so eager, indeed, to get upstairs and try on her finery that she quite upset a Neo-Celtic poet who had come to see if Grandfather would write an article about him, and was standing on the doorstep on one foot in a dreamy manner. He was rather small, and so not difficult to fall over. She did not stop to see if he was injured; she merely recovered herself, grasped her precious boxes more closely and sped on upstairs, thinking how pleasant it was that she was no relation to *him*. To have even fine poetry written about you was bad enough; it must be much worse if the poetry was bad, too.

When she opened her box she found that Mrs. Morrow had seen and bought something else for her; a golden-brown wool jersey sweater suit, with a little brown cap to match.

"Oh, how lovely! I can wear them all day, and the gray things all night—all evening, I mean," Joy exulted. "And maybe I'll never have to put on the picture dresses at all!"

She went to sleep that night with the brown suit laid out in its box across the foot of her bed, below her

feet, and the gray chiffon hat, with its golden yellow roses, on a chair by her, where she could touch it if she woke in the night and thought she had dreamed it. She said her prayers almost into it; she was so obliged to the Lord for the hat and the frocks, and the man who had talked to her in the dark, that she felt as if she ought to take the hat, at least, and show it to God while she was praying.

They had been in Maine long enough for Joy to discover what a cottage inn really was. It appeared that the inn itself lived in the middle, as a sort of parent; and all around it sprang up small cottages, where you and yours could dwell, and never associate with anybody you didn't want to, except at mealtime, or lingering about a little afterwards, or at dances. And if you were unusually exclusive (also unusually rich), they took you over your meals, and you never saw anybody at all. Joy was exceedingly glad that Grandfather was only comfortably off, because she liked, best of all the day's round, the little times before and after dinner when she could sit on the porch and watch people, and decide whom she was going to like most, and whom she was going to be most like.

She wore her brown woolen frock all day long the first day, changing to the gray silk in the evening—the dear gray silk, all little glints of embroidery and little

falls of chiffon!—and the gray hat with it. She was waiting for her grandparents to ask her where she got it, but they were so occupied with getting themselves settled, and seeing that their place and hers at table were sufficiently far from the noisier crowds of people not to be a strain on Grandfather's nerves and Joy's, that nothing was said. As a matter of fact, Grandfather thought Grandmother had bought it for her, and Grandmother thought Grandfather had; so each said pretty things about it to the other, without coming straight out, as their courteous custom with each other was; and the secret was still Joy's.

By the second day Joy saw that people were beginning to find out who Grandfather was. So she deliberately ran away. Not badly, nor far; she only had a waiter who seemed to want to be nice to her make her up a little packet of sandwiches, and then she took to the nearest woods. She quite intended to be back for dinner; she wouldn't have missed the pageant of sunburned, laughing people streaming in, for anything; not even at the risk of being asked if she, too, wrote poetry.

The woods gained, she leaned back against a big oak tree with a rested sigh. There might be all the poetry in the world a half mile off, but here you couldn't see anything but trees and more trees, all autumn reds and browns and yellows, and the two little brown paths that crossed near where she sat. Her

blue, black-lashed eyes rested happily on a great bough of scarlet and yellow maple leaves.

"I haven't got to say one *word* about them," she breathed. "*Nice* leaves!"

Then she felt vaguely penitent; and in spite of the scenery, began to think about Grandfather, and therefore poetry, again—so firm a clutch has habit. There in the wonderful tingling air, with the late sunset glimmering a little through the trees, an old poem began to sing itself through her head. For, though she didn't think so, Joy *did* like poetry.

It was out of Bryant's "Library of Poetry and Song" that she had been brought up on. The book always opened of itself under Joy's hand to "Poems of Fancy."

". . . And I galloped and I galloped on my steed as white as milk,
My gown was of the grass-green and my shoes were of the silk,
My hair was golden-yellow, and it floated to my shoe,
My eyes were like two harebells dipped in little drops of dew . . ."

Joy leaned herself back more luxuriously.

"It *is* like the enchanted forest," she breathed. "I can almost see the Lady in the poem galloping along, and the Green Gnome leaping up to stop her. The path out there is wide enough—people from the inn

go riding on it. I remember their saying so, that old lady with the daughter that wriggles too much."

At this stage in her meditations Joy laughed and ceased wishing. It was all very well to desire Green Gnomes and golden-haired fairy-ladies to gallop down the bridle-path, but the chances were that if any one did come it would be the old lady and her daughter, on livery horses, and that they would wish to alight and talk to her. City-bred Joy didn't want to talk. She only wanted to be left here alone with the trees and the sunset. It was more than time to dress for dinner, she knew it well, for the sunset was a little less bright. But she deliberately stayed where she was, the ballad singing itself dreamily still through her head.

And then she did hear the click of a horse's hoofs, quite plainly.

CHAPTER THREE

PHYLLIS RIDES THROUGH

WHEN Joy could see the rider she was relieved to find that he had no intention of stopping. Then—a little too late—she sprang up and ran after him; for the horse was a pony, and the rider a little boy, laughing too gleefully not to be in mischief, and lashing the pony on. He was having a perfectly wonderful time, apparently, and seemed to have a safe seat; but he was certainly much too young to be galloping through the woods at sunset alone.

Joy fell back panting from her vain chase.

"Why, he wasn't more than four or five," she said half-aloud. "What *will* his mother say?"

But the clatter of the light hoofs, and the delighted shouts of the child, passed like an apparition, leaving Joy half wondering if she had imagined it all. Though she was still a little concerned, because somebody was very fond of that mop of flying dusky hair, and the triumphant little voice that had echoed past her.

"I can wait here, anyway," she decided at once. "Some one may come looking for him, and I can tell which way he went."

She sat still where she was for a little while longer. She had nearly made up her mind to follow the child, when, to her great relief, she heard another horse coming.

"I can send whoever it is after him," she thought, springing up and running out to the path. "Oh, wait! Please wait!" she called to the as yet unseen rider.

The horse was pulled to a walk, and its rider slipped to the ground, coming into Joy's sight with the bridle over her arm, and the animal following her.

"Did you see—" began the strange lady, just as Joy said:

"Would you please——"

Then each stopped and waited for the other to go on, though the lady with the big white horse seemed in haste to ask and be gone. She was the first to continue, rather hurriedly.

"Did you see a little boy on a pony, riding this way?" she asked. "I'm hunting for him."

While Joy replied she looked admiringly at the speaker. She was much taller than Joy, and very pretty, with long blue eyes, a creamy skin, and hair that was the very "golden-yellow" of the ballad. She might have been anywhere in the later twenties, but Joy learned afterwards that she was thirty-two. To Joy's eyes she was the fairy lady of the ballad come true; for she had evidently flung herself on her

horse just as she was, in a green evening gown with a light cloak over it. Even in her anxiety for the child she had about her an atmosphere of bright serenity that made Joy in love with her.

"I was just going to ask you to go after him," Joy replied as she looked. "He went past here a few minutes ago. I'm sure he is too little to be riding alone."

"He is indeed," said the golden lady, smiling. "Little villain! But it seems he doesn't think so! Which way did he go, please?"

"Straight along this path," Joy answered, pointing.

The lady sprang to her horse again.

"Thank you," she called back, then more and more faintly, "I haven't much time—now, to be—grateful as I should be. We'll—come—back——"

The last words were hardly distinguishable from the echo of the flying hoofs. The ballad-lady was gone.

The whole thing seemed to Joy like something out of a pageant. She wondered if the lovely lady in green was the little boy's mother, or his sister or aunt.

"It was a little like the Green Gnome poem, except that she was hunting for him, and that the little boy was pretty," she thought. In the poem the Gnome had turned to a "tall and comely man" when the lady kissed him. She liked the lady; there had been something so gay and friendly about her, just in those

few words, that Joy's heart felt warmed. Very few people near her own age came close enough to stately little Joy to be as friendly as the lady had been—or as the wishing-ring man had been.

"Somewhere," Joy decided happily, "there must be lots of people like them, if I could only find the place. I'm sure I shall some day."

She sat on in the gathering twilight, waiting for them to return. As she sat the thought of the wishing-ring man came back again. Wherever he was, he was wishing her well, and remembering her—he had said—what was it—he'd had a "human five minutes" with her. Her heart beat unreasonably, as if he might be coming down the brown path in the twilight, this instant,—as if the golden lady might bring him back with her.

It was nearly dark, and the wind was getting colder, when the hoofs sounded down the path again. There were three of them now—and Joy's heart gave a little spring, till she saw that the man riding the other horse was no one she knew. The pony was riderless, and he was leading it, while the naughty little boy who had caused all the trouble was perched in front of the lady's saddle, most impenitently conversational. She had one arm tight around him, as if she did not want to lose him again, and she was smiling down at him and answering him gaily as he talked. Punishment was evidently waived, or so far in the future as

not to worry anybody. The child's clear little assured voiced came to her, sitting in the shadows.

"But if God takes care of me, Faver, I don't see why I need a nurse bovvering," he was expostulating.

Joy didn't hear just how his family met this objection. She saw that the lady looked about for her, and could not see her in the gathering darkness.

Then she went back to the hotel, where she was very late for dinner. She looked around for the riders, but she did not see them. Evidently they were having dinner taken over.

Phyllis Harrington, rather regretfully, hooked a dog-chain to the porch railing of the cottage she and her husband had just hired. It was an entirely unnecessary part of the family bull-terrier's wardrobe, and she intended to use it as an instrument of justice. So she called her small son. She believed in making the punishment fit the crime, and Philip had flagrantly run away, quite against orders, the evening before.

He appeared at her summons, smiling angelically. Philip Harrington had not the smallest visible excuse for being the son of his parents, for his father was not particularly dark, and his mother distinctly gold-blond. Philip threw back, it was supposed, to the family Pirate, a semi-mythical person whom Phyllis said she'd had some thirteen generations ago. Phyllis was a New Englander. The Pirate must have been

dark; at least Philip had tragic, enormous brown eyes with dense lashes, a mop of straight black hair, and a dusky skin, deeply rose-red at cheeks and lips. He also possessed the gentle, solemn courtesy of a Spanish grandee, which the Pirate may or may not have been. He was full of charm of manner, and combined a spirit of fearless loving-kindness to all the world with an inability to see why he shouldn't always have his own way; which made him difficult to manage.

"You goin' to chain me up, Mother?" he inquired affectionately, nestling up to her.

"Yes," explained his mother, hardening her heart, "little boys who run away from home like little dogs have to be treated like little dogs."

"Oh, *I'll* be a little dog," replied Philip, entering agreeably into the idea, and backing up to be chained. "No, I'll be a big dog. I'll run around an' jerk my chain an' say 'Woof! Woof!' like the Hewitts' setter. And Foxy 'n I'll have bones together!" His small Velásquez face lighted rapturously at the prospect. "Here, Foxy, Foxy!"

The black French bull whose chain Philip was using dashed up at the summons. He was middle-aged, but he had a young heart still, and his tail vibrated madly as he bounded between Phyllis and her son.

"Oh, he's *got* a bone!" exclaimed Philip, gleefully dropping on all fours.

Phyllis stood up from chaining her child, and turned appealingly to her husband, coming down the steps of the little bungalow with two-and-a-half-year-old Angela on his shoulder.

"You look like a colored illustration from the *Graphic,*" she said irrelevantly. "You're just in time to assist discipline. *Look!*" she pointed tragically to her victim.

He would have been happily disputing the opportune bone with Foxy, had not that faithful animal's devotion led him to hand it over at once.

"Faver, make him take it away from me!" he demanded. "Faver, I'm all chained up! I'm a little dog!"

Little Angela, who looked like a slim, tiny Christmas-card *Christ-kind,* and was as fascinating a little demon as ever coquetted with the world at large, struggled to get down, and demanded to be chained up and be another little dog. Her father set her down, whereat she made a bolt for the dog, the bone, and her happily engaged brother.

"Do you think there's any way of conveying to him that this is not a new amusement, Allan?" demanded his mother, half-laughing.

"Don't let's try," said Allan promptly. "Everything's going beautifully. Philip's happy, and Angela's going to be gloriously dirty in a minute, which will give her nurse something to wash. You know how

bitter Viola is about never getting the children to herself for a minute."

Phyllis slipped an arm through her tall husband's, as they stood by the steps together.

"No, but Allan, what *would* you do?"

Allan laughed.

"Send him back to Wallraven, and tell Johnny Hewitt to see that he's plunged into the middle of the chickenpox epidemic we fled from. How would you like that, young man?"

Philip looked up with deprecating politeness, on being directly addressed.

"Please, Faver, if you don't mind my name's Jinks! You must say, 'Here, Jinks,' and I say 'Woof! Woof!' and wag my tail."

"Say wuff!" echoed Angela, with a dazzling smile at her elders, and an effort not to tumble over on the grass.

Phyllis pounced on her babies at Allan's alarming suggestion, and managed to hug them both at once; an ordeal which Philip stood with every evidence of pleasure, and Angela under protest.

"My poor little lambs! . . . Allan, this is the first chickenpox they've had up there since the summer we came. We'd been married a month or so, and you weren't quite sure whether you liked me or not. Do you remember?"

"I remember that first summer," said he. "It's

the only part of those seven years that I do want to remember. But the chickenpox part of it had escaped me."

"Well, of course," his wife admitted, "in those days children's diseases were nothing whatever in our lives. But when Johnny Hewitt refers to it as that wonderful summer seven years ago, I have discovered that he means it was wonderful because he saved forty-three out of forty-three cases, not because you and I had married each other to please your mother, and were finding out that it was rather nice."

"I'll be hanged if I know to this day what possible niceness there was for you in being married to a man everybody thought would never get well," said Allan.

"He was you," explained Phyllis matter-of-factly, sitting down on a step to look at him better. "Anybody'd fall in love with you, Allan. You know perfectly well that it even happens now."

"Certainly," said he scornfully. "My well-known beauty and charm attract all classes; they besiege my path by day and night. By Jove, Phyllis, there's one now, the flapper I saw in the dining-room lately. She's doubtless come over to say that she'll wait for me till you're through, being young. She's pretty, too."

Phyllis laughed, and patted his foot, the only part of him she could reach without getting up. "Now, now—I meant no harm. You can't help being attrac-

tive. . . . Why, it's the girl in brown, the one who started out of a tree like a dryad, and showed me the way Philip had gone, last night. She was the loveliest creature I ever saw. Look, Allan, she's like a Rossetti picture."

"She *is* like a Rossetti," he answered, "but she looks rather happier. Most of the Rossetti ladies I ever saw hoped to die of consumption shortly."

Joy, coming slowly over the grass on an errand from her grandfather, kept her eyes on the ground, because that way it was easier to remember the message she had to repeat up and down the rows of cottages dotted among the trees. So it was not until she was quite close that she knew Phyllis again.

Philip barked her a cheerful greeting, and Phyllis rose to greet her.

"I am Alton Havenith's granddaughter," Joy began, and then interrupted herself joyfully.

"Oh, it's my lady in green!" she cried. "You didn't see me when you came back."

"I looked for you," Phyllis explained, holding out both hands in welcome, "but it was too dark to see you. I thought you had gone home. Did you say you were Alton Havenith's granddaughter? I love his poems. I'm Phyllis Harrington, and this is my husband. I'm eternally grateful to you for helping me find my little boy. You see I've made sure he won't escape again."

"He isn't chained for life, as you might infer from that," Allan explained.

Philip ceased being a dog for the moment, and held his hand out amiably to Joy.

"I'm Philip," he explained, following his mother's example and introducing himself. "They called me Philip 'cause it was the nearest thing Faver could get to Phyllis. You see, they didn't know there was going to be Angela. This is Angela. Isn't she pretty?"

Angela, on being righted and shown off, produced her usual dazzling smile, and gave Joy a sweet, side-long look out of her azure eyes—the look she knew conquered people. They were both, as Phyllis often said, *such* satisfactory children for exhibition purposes!

"Oh, aren't they darlings!" cried Joy, forgetting her mission gladly. "Will—will they mind if I hug them?"

"Not a bit," answered their father, whom Joy had asked. "They are practically indestructible, and they like petting."

Joy knelt down, putting a shy arm around baby Angela, who, after a moment's survey of her, kissed her frankly of her own accord, with two tight little arms around her neck.

Allan had an idea that the newcomer would be more at ease alone with Phyllis and the children, so he made some excuse about golf (which he hated) and disappeared. Joy sat down on the grass, with Angela

momentarily in her lap, and Foxy, who hinted that he, too, liked kind words, at her side.

She had never had so many people (counting dogs) act as if they liked really her. Foxy and the children didn't care a bit whose granddaughter she was, and Mrs. Harrington, too, had made friends with her without minding. But she was conscientious, and she felt she ought to go on with her errand before she really gave herself up to the enjoyment of her call.

"My grandfather is giving a reading from his works this evening," she said, sitting up mechanically and crossing her hands, "and he sent me to say that he would be glad if you and Mr. Harrington would care to come."

"We'd love to," Phyllis answered on the spot. "At his cottage?"

Joy nodded.

"It's fun," Phyllis went on, "leading this semi-detached life, with no responsibilities whatever. There's only one drawback as far as I'm concerned; if Philip strays off too far somebody may take him for a rabbit or a deer. The places where there's hunting are only two miles away. That's why Allan and I were scouring the woods last night for him. Usually we let him run away as much as he likes, and the poor child can't understand the new arrangement."

Joy looked down at Philip, who had curled himself into an indiscriminate heap with the dog, and was

taking a nap by way of whiling away his imprisonment.

"Do you hunt?" she asked.

Phyllis shook her head.

"The way the gun bangs when it goes off worries me. I believe there's a bangless gun, but even so, you're expected to kill things, and I think the things are much happier alive. I don't even like the taste of them cooked. But Allan hunts. He brings game-bags full of poor little dead things back whenever he's where he can do it. He hasn't yet, here. We just came, you know."

"I'm so glad you did!" said Joy fervently.

"We were like Old Man Kangaroo—we had to!" smiled Phyllis. "There's chickenpox at our usual summer home, so we basely fled, leaving Johnny to struggle against its fearful ravages single-handed."

Joy sat Angela down, because she was beginning to wriggle.

"Is Johnny your brother?" she asked shyly.

Phyllis shook her head.

"I haven't a relative on earth, except these babies—of course Allan's more of a relative by marriage. No, Johnny Hewitt's the family doctor, a classmate of Allan's, and a family possession. He might as well live with us, he's so much about the house and garden. I suppose this place is very good for the angel-children, but I'm afraid that in a few days I'm

going to wish I was back among the roses, with Allan and Johnny and a banjo and a moon!"

Joy's eyes lighted.

"Roses?" she said. "Oh, have you a rose-bush!"

Phyllis laughed.

"'Do we keep a bee?' We have a garden full of roses. The gardener hints mournfully that we ought to take prizes with them, but I know perfectly well that would mean I couldn't pick them unless he let me. So I've given him a bush to play with, and he does take prizes with that. He's colored, so Allan says we have to encourage him to have ambitions. He's married to the cook. Our having colored servants shocked the neighbors terribly at first, but they're hardened to it now. I gave an intelligence office *carte blanche* when I was married, and got the ones I have now; and we're so fond of each other that I simply can't part with them and get haughty white persons."

Phyllis' one idea in those early days, as Joy learned later, had been to have a summer staff who were cheerful. The intelligence office woman had, naturally, chosen happy-minded darkies. And happy they still remained; also adoring.

The neighbors, though Phyllis did not state this, from being shocked had become passionately envious. Servants who had stayed eight years without a change, merely one addition, were things to be watched hungrily.

"I beg your pardon, but it's luncheon-time, Mrs. Harrington," said the children's nurse at this point, appearing in the doorway. "May I have the children?"

Phyllis bent over the sleeping boy and dog and unfastened her son. The nurse gathered him up affectionately, and went in search of Angela, who had strayed around the corner of the house a little while before.

"Oh, I must go," cried Joy, starting to her feet. "They'll be wondering where I am. And I haven't been to half the cottages."

She turned to go, then looked back at Phyllis wistfully.

"Think of it," she breathed. "A garden full of roses, and two men, and a banjo, and a moon!"

Her hands locked together over the invisible wishing ring. She wondered if there was a garden like that anywhere that *he* lived.

Phyllis Harrington looked thoughtfully after her. There was something about Joy Havenith that always made people eager to do pleasant things for her, and watch her enjoying them. She did get so much pleasure out of life whenever it let her.

"It won't be my fault," said Phyllis, coming to a determination, "if that child doesn't get a chance at the garden and the moon, and the men, too!"

When Phyllis made up her mind it generally stayed

made. Accordingly, she went to the reading that night, and afterwards made herself as lovely to the Haveniths as she knew how, which was a good deal. She asked them to have tea with her the next day, and continued to be lovely. She also managed to give them a very fair idea of everything they might be supposed to need to know about the Harrington family. When she had finished they had discovered several mutual friends, a meeting with Mr. Harrington's late mother abroad, the genealogies of both Allan and Phyllis, and even a common ancestor somewhere in the seventeen-nineties on Allan's side. The Haveniths thought it had all just transpired, but Phyllis had really been tactfully offering references. After about a week of pleasant friendship Phyllis produced her invitation.

She wanted to take Joy home with her for the last part of September and the first part of October. Joy was wild with delight at the idea; but her grandparents would not let her go. They never had before, and it didn't occur to them that they could now.

"Just for a little while?" she pleaded.

But her grandparents were firm.

"Under no circumstances could we let you go away from us, dear," said her grandfather firmly. "I am an old man, and the time will come soon enough when I shall be with you no longer. If you loved me, you would not ask it. When your lover comes it will be time enough."

It sounded true enough. Joy did not exactly know how to meet it. Then she brightened up.

"If you let me go for a little while, I'm sure I'd miss you dreadfully, and love you more than ever. I'm sure I would!"

But Grandfather didn't intend to part with his little girl on any such premise as that, and Grandmother was sure something dreadful would happen if she was allowed to go.

"There is no excuse for it, unless you were engaged to be married, dear, and going on a visit to your prospective people-in-law," she said. "I couldn't let you go off without me otherwise."

It was too tempting. Before she thought, Joy had spoken.

"If I were, would it be all right?" she asked.

Grandfather answered her, somewhat at length.

"My dear child, you know my feelings about love. I myself married your grandmother after a two days' courtship, when she was seventeen and I was twenty-one; and I may say that I have never regretted it—nor, I hope, has she. If you were affianced, nothing should cause me to interfere with the course of true love. Your grandmother and I would let you go to visit his people willingly. Your assurance that you loved him——"

Joy leaned forward, her eyes blazing with excitement.

"And suppose I told you I was engaged, would you let me go to visit Phyllis, if she lived near him, and—and his people were so situated that he couldn't have me?"

Grandfather was perfectly certain that Joy was no more engaged than old Elizabeth the cook was, and he went on placidly with his hypothetical case, which was also his hobby.

"If I had met the young man, received him socially, even once, my child, you may be sure, under those circumstances, you might go. One has no right to interfere with——"

Grandmother in the background wasn't so sure, her eager little face said, but she was a very obedient and adoring wife.

Joy interrupted him. He had given her a loophole, and she was desperate to go. She couldn't wait forever for the lover!

"Grandfather, I—I *am* engaged! I met him at one of your receptions, and so did you, *quite* socially. You—I know you must have met him, and liked him, too—everybody does."

It was a terrible thing to do, and Joy's heart beat fast. But surely the Wishing-Ring Man wouldn't mind—he would never know even! And Grandfather had talked so long about giving her up at sight to that hypothetical lover, that he might almost have been said to put the wickedness into her head. And if she

waited for a real one she might wander alone about the parlors till she was an old, old maid with trailing gray braids.

There was a frozen silence.

"En-gaged?" said Grandfather faintly.

Grandfather had a code all to himself. He didn't know it, being a man, but he had. It forbade ever being taken by surprise, ever being at a loss, ever being in the wrong, or ever contradicting himself. This made for great respect, given to him by the world at large, his family, and himself; but it put him at a terrible disadvantage in things like this. He couldn't go back on what the great Alton Havenith had said for many years. Joy, shivering but desperate, knew this perfectly well, though she didn't formulate it.

"You always hoped for it," she told him firmly.

"I—I did," said Grandfather with an obvious discomfort, but with unabated loyalty to himself. Then he snatched at a pretext. Poor little Grandmother's hands were opening and shutting, but she was well trained, and she didn't speak till he was through dealing with the situation.

"Can your friends vouch for him socially?" Grandfather demanded.

Joy's alert, frightened mind scurried about for a moment, then she plunged into further fabrications.

"He's—why, Grandfather, he's their closest

friend, the one they call Johnny. He—he lives near them."

Grandfather was entirely what the profane would call up a tree. He had been giving his consent for some seventeen years. And Joy had swept the ground from under his feet. He did not in the least remember meeting this amazing lover at any of his receptions, but there had been a tradition for many years that he never forgot a name or a face. Now he *had* been doing it for two or three seasons past, but he never admitted it to himself, and nobody else dared admit it, either.

As for the truth of what Joy said, it did not occur to him to doubt that. Joy had never told them anything but the truth in her life. As a matter of fact, there had never been anything for her to deceive them about. But that did not dawn on him.

There was another frozen silence. Grandfather was checkmated.

Joy had not intended to do it, of set purpose. She respected Grandfather too thoroughly. But she was struggling for the only piece of happiness that had ever come her way in the whole of her placid, tranced little life.

"In that case, my dear," Grandfather pronounced slowly, "I give my consent. What did you say the young man's name was?"

"John," she said faintly, bending her head, and

coloring hotly and suddenly. She had just remembered that the Wishing-Ring Man's name really was Jack, and she hadn't meant to use *that* name. That was private.

"That makes it a little better," said Grandmother; why, Joy did not see or know until much too late. "His name is Hewitt. You remember Mrs. Harrington's discussing him with us, Alton." . . . Then all her obedience to Grandfather did not keep her from putting her arms around Joy and beginning to cry.

"Oh, my dear, my dearest," she said. "Why didn't you confide in me about it? You know I would have been so interested!"

Joy had a little lump in her throat, and she almost cried out, "I'm not, Grandmother!"

But she had all Grandfather's pride, and—and besides, she had gone this far—how could she go back?

Grandfather interposed, struggling hard with his natural surprise.

"A little emotion is natural in this case, dear Jennie," he said, "but you must make allowance for a young girl's shyness. The young man, I trust, will speak to us about it."

How she would explain to Phyllis had not yet occurred to Joy. . . . There are times when an education in all the best poets is an everlasting nuisance.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive!"

danced through Joy's head. . . . If only those fatal first sentences hadn't popped out, and if she only hadn't been too proud to take them back!

Just the same she continued to feel that a month of life off with gay, kind people her own age was worth almost any price; which was exceedingly wrong, and got Joy into a fearful mess, as amateur lying is apt to do. Because Grandfather rose up after this, with what Phyllis called his Earl of Dorincourt air, and spoke.

"There is no time like the present for the rectifying of an error. We will go over now, and explain to Mrs. Harrington that when we refused our consent to this visit we were unaware of all the circumstances. Come, my love. Come, Joy."

From sheer paralysis of will power Joy let him draw her hand through his arm in his accustomed way, and march her off towards the Harrington cottage between himself and Grandmother. She felt like Mary-Queen-of-Scots being led to execution, and exceedingly regretful that she had never learned to faint. Suddenly a wonderful thought came over her.

"Let me run ahead, please, and see if Phyllis is at home," she asked, and ran ahead of them without waiting for an answer.

It was golden, late afternoon, and she could see Phyllis on her veranda. She was lying in the hammock with little Angela nestled beside her, and Philip

constructing something monumental with screws and wires on the floor by them. She had apparently been telling them a quite unexpurgated edition of Little Red-Riding-Hood, for as Joy flew up the steps Philip swerved with a startled look.

"Do you think there could be a wolf after Joy?" he inquired of his mother.

"Phyllis, please, I want to talk to you alone," Joy panted. "I have to tell you before *they* get here. And—" she laughed a little breathlessly—"it isn't fit for the children's ears."

"You don't know what their ears are used to," Phyllis answered leisurely. "Philip, darling, you can go and hunt for your friend Mr. Jones on the links, if you want to."

Philip dashed off, grinning happily. He had hopes, which his mother was not supposed to know (but did), of being allowed to caddy some glorious day, if he watched his opportunity.

"Oh, Phyllis, I'm in dreadful trouble, and please won't you help me?" Joy began, flinging herself close to the hammock and clutching its edge with one nervous hand. "Please help me——"

"Of course," said Phyllis. "What's it about?"

But Joy had delayed her story too long. Before Phyllis had more than made her rash promise of help the elder Haveniths were upon her. Phyllis rose to her feet to greet them, with an air of gracious courtesy

which the infant swinging beside her scarcely impaired at all.

"We have brought our little girl over, my dear Mrs. Harrington, to tell you that we have reconsidered our decision," Mr. Havenith stated, sweeping his broad Panama from his wonderful white hair. "The information Joy has brought us——"

He was interrupted by the appearance round the corner of the cottage of two men. One was Allan Harrington. The other—

"Here's Johnny, Phyllis," Allan called joyously. "His old epidemic's all over, everybody either killed or cured. He was actually on the right train, the one he said he'd take."

Joy's heart turned over. This was a doubly dreadful thing she had brought on herself.

It was the Wishing-Ring Man!

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESCUE OF THE PRINCESS

For one awful moment nobody spoke. John Hewitt, having no key to the situation, was quite unembarrassed. So was Angela, who wriggled herself to earth with a rapturous shriek of "Johnny! Johnny! Cakies!"

Hewitt gathered up Angela, and, followed by his host, came up the steps, to where Phyllis stood, tall and gracious, with Joy clinging to her.

"Why, it's little Joy!" he said surprisedly, smiling at her as he took Phyllis' hand. "Where did you find her, Phyllis?"

Joy clung closer to Phyllis, waiting for the storm to break, for Mr. Havenith was stepping forward now, holding a courteous, if dazed, hand to the man his granddaughter had elected as her fiancé. He spoke before Phyllis could answer.

"And so you are my little girl's betrothed!" he said with rather stiff courtesy. "Ah—yes. I remember you, sir."

John Hewitt's gray eyes moved from Phyllis, standing there obviously quite taken by surprise, to Joy,

clinging to her burning-cheeked, in what was quite as obviously an agony of terror. He caught his breath for a moment, moved forward and opened his lips to speak, then shut them again firmly and stood still where he was, with the afternoon sunlight glinting over his fair head, and little Angela's more golden one, pressed close beside it. As he remained still, his eyes rested gravely on Joy: the very little princess of the fairytale, with the dragon imminent at any moment. She looked very piteous and terrified and small; not more than fifteen, and unbearably afraid of him, with her black-framed blue eyes fixed on his in an appeal as agonized as it was unconscious. He caught his breath again, then turned to answer her grandfather, his decision made.

"I am glad you remember me, sir," he said gravely, "and exceedingly glad that you are willing Joy should——"

Joy gave a long shudder of relief, and relaxed all over. He was not going to put her to shame there before all of them. She would have time to explain. She would not have her visit, but that, even, seemed a small thing beside the dreadful danger she had just escaped. She could tell him when they were alone.

Grandmother was coming forward now, to speak to him, where he stood, straight and dignified and handsome, with the little girl still on one arm.

"You are my old friend Grace Carpenter's son,

as I was just telling Mr. Havenith. Edith Carpenter's nephew. . . . I—I am glad you are a friend's son," Grandmother finished tremulously.

John set Angela down and took Grandmother's hand, saying something to her gently—Joy never knew what. She had stood enough.

Phyllis felt Joy's hand pull out of hers. The inn cottages were all built alike, so Joy knew perfectly well how to bolt through the front door, through the living-room to the back door and away. Viola, mending a little sock, caught a glimpse of flying skirts and flying braids.

"Them red-haired folks certainly is tempestuous, but they's gitters," she remarked to herself philosophically, and went on with her mending.

Outside, Phyllis looked at Allan and Allan looked at Phyllis. There didn't seem much to say about it. At last Allan spoke, in a way that he and Phyllis agreed afterwards was painfully inadequate, but was all he could think of to say.

"Ah—would you like to put away your suitcase, old man?" he inquired. "You must be tired of—of seeing it there."

Phyllis gurgled under her breath, but every one else was deadly serious. Nobody seemed to see anything funny about the offer.

"Thank you very much," John responded solemnly. "Yes, thank you, Harrington, I believe I would."

He bent over and picked it up, and followed his host inside.

Neither of them said anything as they went upstairs.

"Here's your room," Allan offered, showing it politely.

"So it is," murmured John in a quite expressionless voice, looking at it without seeming to know how to enter.

"It's to live in, you know," Allan suggested.

At this broad hint John went in and put his suitcase on the bed. He still appeared to be in more or less of a trance-state.

"If we'd known, we'd have tied a little white ribbon here and there, and arranged a rice-cascade—a shower, isn't it? or something," continued his host, amiably. "Awfully sorry, old chap, but you shouldn't have been so darn secretive. But we'll do our best——"

John awoke at this, and caught up a small pink pincushion which sat in the mathematical middle of his dresser, and threw it. It didn't hit Allan, because he dodged.

"That's one of Phyllis' favorite pincushions," he warned John from outside the door. "I say, Johnny, this isn't any way to repay hospitality."

He went on down the stair, and John could see his shoulders shaking.

"They've both got too confounded much sense of humor," said John bitterly.

But he went out and picked up the pincushion just the same, and addressed himself to the methodical unpacking of his suitcase.

"Oh, I forgot! Congratulations!" Allan called cheerily up from the stair-foot.

John, casting collars automatically from suitcase to dresser-top, growled.

"Congratulations! I need prayers more!" he said under his breath. "But—poor little thing! I might as well have stepped on a kitten! . . . I certainly did tell her to hope for better things and they'd come. . . . I didn't know I was going to be one of 'em!"

Then, as he continued to unpack he grinned in spite of himself, for into his mind came a poem of Guiterman's he'd read lately, about an agnostic Brahmin who didn't believe in prayer, and came inadvertently on a tiger praying for a meal in the jungle:

> *"The trustful Tiger closed his prayer—*
> *Behold—a Brahmin trembling there!*
> *The Brahmin never scoffed a whit.*
> *The Prayer had answer.*—He *was* It."

"I wonder," mused John, "whether she's a kitten, or a tiger? Anyway, *I* was *It!* . . . I can't stand any more of anything just now. I'll get out till dinnertime!"

He tiptoed downstairs, and in his turn slid out the back door. The Haveniths were still talking to the Harringtons on the front veranda, he noted with a certain pleasure in their durance, and Phyllis' back looked polite but tired. He headed for the adjacent woods, diving into the leafy coolness with a feeling of escape. The wood blew cool and a little moist, and fragrant with far-off wood-smoke, and there was a feeling of solitude that he liked. He sighed with relief as he rounded the turn in the wood-path.

And there before him, at the foot of her great oak, stood Joy, not expecting him in the least. She uttered a little cry at sight of him, and turned to run away. Then she thought better of it, and stood her ground. Just what John might be going to do or say to her she did not know, but she thought he was entitled to do almost anything, and stood prepared for it, her face buried in her hands.

John had been a little irritated at the sight of her, but her evident terror moved him, as it had before. He was, through and through, the best type of physician; a man whose first and ruling impulse was always to help and heal, whether it was body or soul, or only feelings. Joy, standing with her face hidden, felt him laying his hands, smooth and strong, over hers.

"Aren't you even going to look at the fiancé you've picked out?" she heard him say half-amusedly. "Why, I'm not going to hurt you, child."

He took her hands down. She let him, and raised her eyes to his kindly, wise steel-gray ones. He seemed to be regarding her in a friendly fashion, and she dared to look at him friendlily, too—even to smile a little. He brought to her the same sense of brightness and well-being that she had experienced before, and her heart felt lighter, though by every law of reason she should have been more ashamed than ever, confronted with him, there alone.

"Of course you won't hurt me," she said. "But—well, when you steal anybody's name and get engaged to it, they have a right to be cross. You can be, if you want to, and I won't say a word. I know very well I deserve it!"

John Hewitt *had* intended to be cross—very cross indeed; but with Joy's kitten-blue eyes fixed trustfully on his he found it difficult even to be stern. He made an attempt, nevertheless.

"Don't you know that a little girl like you isn't old enough to be engaged to be married?" he told her severely. He sat down on a heap of brown and scarlet leaves, the better to show Joy the error of her ways. "What made you think of it at all?"

Joy smiled. She was quite at ease now, with the curious feeling of ease and happiness he always gave her, and she answered him calmly, drawing a heavy copper plait forward over each shoulder.

"It's these that have made you think so all along. I'm nineteen."

John sat back a little, with both hands clasped over one gray-clad knee, and looked at her again in the light of that.

"It's hard to realize, I know," she said apologetically. She lifted the wonderful braids and bound them crownwise around her head, tying the ends together behind as if they were pieces of ribbon, and tucking them under with a comb, from behind one ear. She anchored them in front with the other comb, and smiled flashingly at him again. "Now it seems real, doesn't it? And now I'll tell you all about it—that is, if you have the time."

He looked again at the lovely, earnest little face under the crown of hair, and nodded gravely. She was not like any girl he had ever known. . . . She was like the girls you imagined might exist, sometimes, and wondered if you'd like them, after all, if they did. He wanted her to go on, at least, and felt stealing over him a conviction that she couldn't have done so particularly wrong.

Joy felt the lessened severity of his attitude, and took courage from it as she began.

"You remember that day you came to Grandfather's? You remembered my name, so I'm sure you do remember the rest. Well, that day I was especially unhappy because—well, it's hard to explain the be-

cause. Things were just as good as they always had been, really; only that day I couldn't stand them any more. You know things *can* be that way."

She looked at him expectantly, and he nodded again.

"It was a forlorn little life for a child like you—oh, I keep forgetting!"

He laughed.

"But even nineteen," he explained, "isn't particularly aged to an elderly gentleman of thirty-four."

"As old as that?" queried Joy.

She looked at *him* again in the light of new information, but she shelved it for the time, and went on with her defense.

"Well, that afternoon, when things were perfectly down to the very flattest bottom—'and not a ray of hope to gild the gloom'—you came. And things brightened up. You know you told me that if I hoped along, things I wanted would come?"

"I do know it!" said John with a fervor she did not understand.

"Well, they did!" she announced, looking at him radiantly, and pausing a little so he would have time to realize it.

John Hewitt's patients had always told him that just his coming in made them better, and he had simply accepted the faculty as useful in his work. But he had never thought that his personality could affect a perfectly well person. At Joy's tribute, un-

consciously given, his pulse quickened a little. Had he really had this much power for happiness over the child? . . .

"Almost right away they brought me to this lovely place," she went on happily, "and almost right after that I met the Harringtons. It's all seemed to me because of your wishing ring."

"What wishing ring?" he asked, smiling indulgently at her, as one does at a child's fancies.

"Don't you remember?" she asked a little forlornly. "Well—you have such lots of things to remember! You said, 'Just keep on believing things will come right, don't lose heart, and they will.' I said, 'Like a wishing ring?' and you said, 'Yes.' I've felt as if I wore one—played I did, I suppose you'd say. I—I suppose I really am not being grown-up very well, after all. . . . Well, after I knew Phyllis the best thing of all happened. She asked me to come stay with her, and have roses and a moon, and children all day long. But Grandfather always said I couldn't go under any circumstances but being engaged. . . . And I was so wild to go—it just slipped out—truly it did! And then—the gods overtook me!"

She clasped her hands in her lap, and looked up at him—she had sunk to the ground when he did, and was also sitting on a leaf-heap. She tilted her head back against the big tree, and awaited her sentence.

John felt for the moment exactly the mingled

pleasure and embarrassment that a man does who has been adopted by an unusually nice dog. It is a compliment, but one doesn't know exactly what to do with the animal. Joy sat and looked at him with what seemed to him to be a perfect trust that he would be good to her. As a matter of fact, Joy was merely pleased because he was there and not angry at her. She did hope a little that he would offer to do the explaining that they weren't engaged to Grandfather. But she was quite unprepared for what he said next, after a little silence.

"You're a brave little thing," he told her gently. "You shan't miss your roses and your moons on my account. . . . I'll tell you what we'll do, Joy. We'll stay engaged till we're out of sight of land."

She looked at him with parted lips.

"What—what do you mean?"

"You shall go to Phyllis' just the same, child. We won't even tell the Harringtons that it isn't true till we're on the train for Wallraven."

Joy stared at him, incredulous still. She could not speak for a moment.

"Oh!" she said then. "Oh—why, you're the kindest man I ever knew. But then, I *knew* you were! Thank you ever so much . . . but—are you sure you don't mind at all?"

"Quite sure," he told her.

"Well—*thank* you!" said Joy fervently. "And

oh, if I ever get the chance, I promise I'll do something for you you want. Just think of what you're giving me—a whole month of being just as happy as I like! We can go back to the bungalows now. I don't mind being congratulated one bit after this—do you?"

"N-no," said John a little dubiously. Then he laughed. "There's one thing you've forgotten. There's always a ring when people are engaged, even for four days."

Joy said nothing to this. She watched him while he slipped a curious, chased dull gold band with a diamond sunk in it, from his little finger. "It isn't a conventional solitaire sitting up on stilts, but it will do, won't it?" he asked.

She held her little slim hand out for it, her face sparkling. His were the long, slender, square-tipped fingers of the typical "surgeon's hand," smooth and strong. But Joy's hands were little for her build, which was not large, and the ring slid down her engagement finger till she had to anchor it with a little gold band from the other hand, pushed down over it.

"I'll take very good care of it, and polish it before I give it back to you," she assured him.

He answered her on a sudden boyish impulse.

"I don't want you to give it back to me. You're to keep it. . . . It can be your wishing ring that you said I brought you, Joy."

She smiled down at it, loose on her finger.

"Why, so it is—my wishing ring!" she sighed happily. She turned it about her finger, and he saw her lips move. She was wishing. He wondered what, but she did not offer to tell him.

"I wish that he may have the thing he wants the very most in all the world," she was saying fervently under her breath. When she was done she rose from the leaves, and he sprang up beside her.

"There's one more ceremony," he told her, half-amusedly. "Even for a four days' engagement, to make it *quite* legal—" He bent toward her, smiling.

"Oh—oh, should we?" stammered Joy, her wild-rose color deepening to rose-red.

"I really think we should," said John solemnly. It was the nearest to teasing any one he had come for a long time, and he found himself rather enjoying it. Besides, in his heart lurked the feeling that the child ought to realize that she might have let herself in for a good deal, if she hadn't fallen into merciful hands. He was a little ashamed of himself at the sweet way she took it. She merely held herself quite still and serious, and lifted her face a little.

John was a young man who always went through with anything he had begun, and he bent over and kissed Joy, very lightly.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I—I didn't mind," said Joy, trying to make him

happy, for she saw he *was* sorry, though she didn't know why or what for.

"You dear child!" he said. "Well, I won't do it again. I was teasing you, and I shouldn't. Come, we ought to go now."

She fell into step beside him, still mystified, but very much obliged to him in general, and they went back to the bungalow and congratulations side by side.

Meanwhile two very much surprised young people confronted two still perturbed old ones in the sunset on Phyllis' veranda.

"Now *why* do you suppose," Allan demanded of the world in general, "Johnny didn't break the news to us? I've rarely known a man who liked secrets less. He hasn't even come over and looked radiant with his mouth shut, as a normal human being would."

Phyllis picked up Angela and gazed over her head as she considered. She had a way of using Angela as most women do knitting or embroidery: as something to have in her hands when she wanted to think.

"It was certainly a case of very silent emotion," she said contemplatively.

"What was there a case of, Mother?" demanded Philip, reappearing, very dusty, and climbing up on all of her that Angela didn't occupy, thereby damaging fatally the spotlessness of her crinkled white silk skirt. "Is it something to eat? Did Johnny bring——"

"Johnny brought the rather surprising news that

he and Joy are going to be married," his mother informed him, kissing the back of his neck. She spoke to him, as she always did, in a manner entirely unedited for children. If he didn't always know the long words, as she said, so much the better—his growing intelligence was stretched a little hunting them up.

The growing intelligence was certainly excited now.

"Married?" inquired Philip indignantly, voicing the feelings of the entire party. "Well, I think it would of been politer to have let us know before they spoke to each other about it!"

It was no time to feed either of the children, and their nurse would have been horrified, but Allan produced a box of marshmallows from behind a jardinière before anything more was said.

"Here, my dear son," he said politely. "You deserve them for saying that. 'Them's our sentiments,' too, only we hadn't quite decided how to put it. Now go off and die happily, and only give Angela two."

Philip returned thanks automatically, clutched the box and fled before any one should interfere to revoke this wonderful gift from Heaven. Angela wriggled her small, blue-overalled body down and went in passionate pursuit.

"Now, you mustn't worry about it," Phyllis said to Mrs. Havenith, rising with one of her swift, graceful movements and putting both arms about the disconsolate old lady. "John Hewitt is one of the best men

I ever knew. He's a rock of defense. Indeed, you may trust him with Joy. Allan has known him since they were in college together, and he has been our closest friend since our marriage. He's—why, he's nearly as nice as Allan, and that's saying all I *can* say. Isn't he, Allan?"

"As nice as I am?" said Allan, laughing and coming nearer to them. "That would be difficult, you know, Phyllis! But, seriously, Mrs. Havenith," he went on more gravely, "you can trust Hewitt to make Joy very happy. He's one of the best fellows I ever knew. And he is amply able to take care of Joy, if that is worrying you."

"He's perfectly adorable to his mother, too," Phyllis interposed; "and she's that marvelous thing, a mother who wishes her son would marry. You don't know what a lot there is in that!"

"True," said Allan teasingly, in a tone too low for any one but his wife to hear; "it can't be carried too far, as I have reason to know."

Phyllis had been rather unusually her mother-in-law's choice—indeed, the late Mrs. Harrington had done a good deal more in the business than she had any right to, and only Phyllis' own sweetness and common sense and the fact that Allan and Phyllis fell in love after their marriage had justified what old Mrs. Harrington did in the case. And when it did turn out properly she was not there to see, having died

as soon as she had gotten her son (who was then, as every one thought, hopelessly paralyzed) safely married.

Phyllis broke off to say swiftly, under her breath, "I'll be even with you for that, Allan Harrington!" and went on trying to console the Haveniths; for poor Mr. Havenith sat, dignified and forlorn, trying to look perfectly omniscient and satisfied and not succeeding a bit.

After repeated assurances the Haveniths seemed a little happier, and went back to their bungalow to dress for dinner. The Harringtons sank back in their chairs with a sigh of relief apiece.

"I don't care if Philip eats every marshmallow on earth, I'm not going to stir till I've talked it over with you, Allan," said his wife determinedly.

She looked so pretty as she said it that Allan rose from his chair, tipped her chin back and kissed her.

"So she should gossip if she wanted to," he told her teasingly, dropping back into his own chair before she could object, if she had wanted to. "Go on, my dearest; say all the things you wouldn't say before the Haveniths. I'm perfectly safe."

"Yes, thank goodness, you are," acknowledged his wife. "Telling you things is like dropping them down a deep black well, which is a great comfort to a confiding person like myself. Well, then, if you insist on knowing what my lower nature thinks of this perform-

ance, it's my opinion that Joy and Johnny both ought to have their ears boxed. I don't believe in corporal punishment as a rule, but if there ever was a time for it——"

"In Philip's words," suggested her husband, "it would have been politer to have told us before they made up their minds!"

Phyllis laughed.

"I confess I rather agree with him," she said. "It was a little shock. Just the same, I never came across any one sweeter or prettier or more attractive than Joy, and it certainly is a comfort to know that John's wife will be some one I can be friends with without a struggle. You never *can* tell what a man's going to marry."

Allan arose and walked up and down meditatively, his golden-brown eyes fixed on the dulling sunset. He had spent several of his years lying on his back, as the result of an automobile accident in his early youth, and since he had been given back the use of his limbs he never kept still unnecessarily. He had arrears to make up, he said.

Phyllis watched him striding back and forth, tall and graceful, and forgot all about Joy's love-affairs. For the moment, watching his grace of movement lovingly, she was back in the days that had seemed so happy then, but were so much less happy than these, when they had had their first glad certainty that he

would entirely recover. It had taken less than six months from the time he first stood, before he could walk easily, and another six before he could go back to horseback—tennis and swimming had been later still. It seemed sometimes to them both as if it had all been a dream, so active and untiring he was now.

"Heaven *has* been good to us," she said irrelevantly, but earnestly, looking up at him.

"Heaven's been good to me, I know," Allan said tenderly. "I have the best and sweetest girl in the world to spend my life with me . . ."

"John would disagree with you," said Phyllis, smiling up at him nevertheless, and flushing. "Allan, did it strike you that John would have been just as well pleased if Joy *hadn't* broken the news to Grandfather right then?"

"Johnny's like Talleyrand; you'd never know it from his expression if some one kicked him from behind. . . . Not that I'd like to be the kicker."

"So if he looked surprised, which he certainly did," pursued Phyllis decisively, "he was *quite* surprised, not to say upset."

"Oh, not as bad as all that," said Allan, who was not given to analysis. "I say, Phyllis, we really ought to go off and see if the children aren't dying under a tree somewhere."

"They are not," said the children's mother firmly. "You know Angela is much more under Philip's

thumb than she is yours or mine or Viola's, and he's a martinet where she's concerned. She'll never get more than her legal two marshmallows, and a boxful won't hurt *him.*"

"You're such a blessing, Phyllis," he answered irrelevantly. "Before the children came I used to wonder a little whether they wouldn't get in the way of my enjoyment of your society; but you didn't die and turn into a mother one bit. You've just added it on, like a sensible girl."

"Well, of course I'm attached to the babies," said Phyllis, who would have died cheerfully for either of them, "but you'd naturally come first. And they're much happier than if I were one of those professional mothers who can't discuss anything but croup. . . . Allan, it's time we began putting up triumphal arches. Here they are."

Allan began to whistle "Here Comes the Bride" softly and profanely under his breath, as Joy and John Hewitt neared them, but Phyllis managed to stop him before he was audible.

"She *is* a darling, isn't she?" Phyllis whispered, as she stood on the steps with one hand on Allan's arm. "Look at her, Allan—she looks like a strong little Rossetti angel! Oh, I'm so glad it's happened!"

She ran impulsively down the steps to greet them, her hands outstretched.

"I *am* so glad!" she said sincerely. "I don't be-

lieve anything nicer could have happened, even if we *weren't* notified!" She put one arm around Joy, giving the unoccupied other hand to John Hewitt. "And I think it's specially nice of you to stay with me instead of with Mrs. Hewitt, my dear."

Joy looked up at Hewitt appealingly. She was already beginning to feel that he was to be depended on to see her through things.

"I think Mother will want her innings sooner or later," he said. "But we haven't really told either of you all about it. You shall have the whole thrilling tale in the train. Suspend judgment on us both till then, please."

"Oh, there isn't any judgment," Phyllis answered gaily. "You needn't try to get out of your engagement on our account, either of you. The Harrington family registers entire satisfaction, doesn't it, Allan?"

"We're both awfully glad, old man," said Allan for his part.

Joy wondered, her heart beating with excitement, if they would mind very much when they heard the truth. . . . But such kind people as the Harringtons couldn't be *very* angry!

She was beginning to feel irrevocably engaged. . . . Never mind—John Hewitt would see her through. She looked up at him, and he smiled down on her.

"Let's all have dinner sent over here," suggested

Phyllis brilliantly, "to celebrate. We'll have Viola go over to the hotel for your grandparents."

But Grandfather, it appeared, had gone to bed to rest from his excitement, and Grandmother, of course, was staying with him. So the four of them ate together in the little green living-room of the bungalow, talking and laughing happily. Joy, between Allan and John, spoke very little. But she felt so contented and so in the midst of things that she did not need to talk. She gleamed and shone like a jewel or a flower, smiling and answering happily when she was addressed: and John, looking at her, felt that his four days' protectorate was going to be perfectly simple and easy to endure.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SHADOW OF GAIL

Joy spent most of the next morning talking to her grandparents—at least, they talked and she listened. Grandmother, now that the first shock was over, took the news with the same sweet and patient acceptance of people's behavior that forty-five years' sojourn among poets had taught her. The fact that Edith and Grace Carpenter were John Hewitt's aunt and mother appeared to comfort her a great deal. It made her feel less that Joy was marrying into a strange tribe.

Joy was pleased that this gave her grandmother relief. It was not till the day of departure that she discovered what awful thing more had been the result of the friendship. Indeed, it could have occurred to nobody, although, as John and she agreed afterwards, anybody *should* have seen what was going to happen!

For the remaining days at the mountain inn there was little excitement. Joy kept close to Phyllis or her grandmother, and John enjoyed himself in what struck the Harringtons as being rather too much his usual way. It seemed to them that a little scheming to see Joy alone would have been more appropriate. But

neither Phyllis nor Allan were given to being relentlessly tactful, or planning situations for people. They reasoned that if the others really wanted *tête-à-têtes* they could manage them without help; and doubtless would, once they were in the country. So peace and unruffledness reigned in a way that was most surprising, considering the real facts of the case. They continued, even in Joy's mind, till almost the last minute, when she stood on the platform of the resort station with Phyllis, Allan, John, the children, Viola, and the bulldog, awaiting their train.

Philip was having to be cheered and distracted: his tender heart was nearly broken over the fact that his beloved Foxy had to travel in the baggage-car, when he would have been so much happier in the bosom of his family. Philip could not be restrained from pleading the dog's cause at length with a fatherly baggageman whose heart he had quite won in four minutes.

"He has a green-plush chair at home that he *always* sits in, and nobody takes it away from him, not even company," he explained earnestly. "He isn't used to baggage-cars—truly he isn't. He's a wonderful-mannered dog. And father says that if he lived up to his pedigree he wouldn't 'sociate wiv *any* of us. You can *see* he doesn't belong in a baggage-car!"

The baggageman, melted by Philip's ardent pleadings, was yielding to the extent of letting Foxy's family sit with him in relays and cheer him as much as they

liked, when Grandmother dropped her bombshell. At least, that was what John called it when they talked it over afterwards. Joy always spoke of it as "the time Grandmother said the awful thing."

"Good-by, my little girl," she said. "I know Grace Carpenter's boy can't but be good to you. And, darling —she asked me to keep it for a surprise—I only heard this morning—but I know surprises aren't always pleasant—and you're so young, you need to be prepared. Grace wrote me she was greatly surprised by the news, though I'm sure she needn't have expected to be told if we weren't—but she was very sweet about it, and is giving a dance to all the nice people in Wallraven for you. It's set for the evening after you get there. She tells me she has arranged the invitations already, in a way that makes the short notice seem all right. Grace was always so ingenious. . . . Oh, there's the train—good-by, darling! Be a good girl!"

Joy was aghast.

"*Grandmother!*" she began. "Oh, Grandmother. I have to tell you! . . . I—oh, John, tell her! I can't go! I——"

She turned to Hewitt despairingly. But he had not been listening: he had been watching the argument between Philip and the baggageman.

"Hurry, Joy, train's coming," was all he said, and caught her arm, whisking her aboard.

She pulled back, but that made no difference. He had her established in a seat, with what Phyllis called his "genial medical relentlessness," in spite of her appeals.

"But I *can't* go!" she protested weakly from her seat, as the train pulled out of the station.

"But, you see, you have," was John's placidly unanswerable reply, as he stowed his light overcoat on the rack above them and laid her coat over that with maddening precision. He smiled at her protectingly.

"Why, my dear child, what made you lose your nerve that way at the last minute?"

Then Joy understood that he had not heard the blow fall.

If it had been anybody but John she would have been much more embarrassed than she was, but by now she had come unconsciously to feel that when things went wrong John was the natural person to come to. He could always help her through them.

"Grandmother told me—" she began, then stopped. It was pretty hard to tell, after all.

"Go on," he told her encouragingly. "Grandmother told you what?"

"She told me that she wrote your mother, and your mother said—she said she wished we'd told her; but, anyway, she's sent out invitations for a big party—to meet *me!*"

It all came with a rush. She didn't dare to meet John's eyes after she had said it.

She heard his long, low whistle of astonishment, scarcely suppressed in time, and a lower, but quite as fervent, "Great Scott!" and then silence. It was not for a full minute that she dared look in the direction of his chair, which he had swung away when she had told him. She gave one quick glance, then another longer one. She could not see his face, but his shoulders were shaking. . . . Had it moved him so?

Joy was used, at Grandfather's, to hear of people being "moved."

"I didn't think John was the kind of a man to have emotions outside of him that way," she thought a little disappointedly, "but I suppose an awful thing like this——"

About then he turned himself toward her. He was laughing!

"Do you think it's funny?" she demanded.

"Funny?" replied John Hewitt, still laughing desperately, and trying quite as desperately to do it quietly enough to prevent the descent of the others, wanting to know what he was laughing at. "I think it's one of the funniest things that ever happened. Talk about Nemesis—if ever a punishment fitted the crime, this does!"

Joy sighed relievedly. At least, he wasn't being angry about it, and he might very well have been. She

glanced out the window, which, like the windows of most New England cars in summer, had evidently been closed ever since John Hancock died, and glued in place. Then suddenly the thing struck her as funny, too. They were in for it, and by their own act. She began to laugh with him, quite forgetting that she had more explanations before her, and as a really honorable girl had no alternative but going back to Grandmother with her sins on her head.

"Oh, it *is* ridiculous," she gasped. "I feel as if I'd kidnapped you and couldn't dispose of you. . . . We really must stop laughing, or the others will come down on us to know what we're laughing at."

"You won't be able to dispose of me till the visit's over, at any rate," John answered her, sobering a little. "My mother and your grandmother have settled that for us effectually."

Joy sat bolt upright and faced him.

"You mean you're going to let it go on?"

"Why, of course I'm going to let it go on," said he matter-of-factly. "What else can we do about it?"

Joy's heart gave a spring of happiness. She wouldn't miss her visit, after all!

"We can find out that we don't like each other, and break off the day you go home. I'll come back from the train very sad," he told her.

"Thank you *very* much," she said happily. "I thought I was going to have to confess to every one

and go back to Grandmother. I'm very glad I needn't."

"You poor kiddie!" he said, as he had said the first time he met her. "Well, on this particular point all you have to do is remember what Beatrice Fairfax says, 'Never explain and never confess, and you'll be respected and admired by all.'"

"It sounds like getting admiration and respect under false pretenses," Joy answered doubtfully. But she dimpled as she said it and looked up sideways at John under her black eyelashes.

The effect was so unexpected and pretty that it set John wondering why she didn't do it oftener. Suddenly a probable reason dawned on him. When John Hewitt discovered anything wrong it was his prompt habit to right it, and he did so now.

"See here, child, I can't have you being afraid of me," he said peremptorily. "When I told you I was a trial fiancé, I didn't mean that I was to be less of a fiancé than a trial. If we're going to be theoretically engaged for a month, we'll have to be friends, at least, and friends trust each other, and know they can ask each other to do anything they want. They know, too, that they never need be afraid of either being angry at the other."

"Then I'm to take it for granted that you feel as friendly toward me as I do toward you?" she asked.

"Why, naturally," he answered. "That's friendship."

"It sounds much nicer than anything I ever heard about in my life," said Joy enthusiastically. "But—are you sure I'm not the one that's going to be more of a trial than a fiancée? I—I don't want to be a bother, you know."

"If you are, I'll tell you," he promised.

"All right," said Joy contentedly, "and I promise not to have my feelings hurt a bit."

She felt quite unafraid of him by now, as he had intended, for they had been talking together as if they were exactly the same age—or, rather, Joy thought, as if nobody had any age at all.

"Do you know," she told him confidentially, "I *did* want a lover, back there at home. A real one, I mean. I saw a girl with one, and you could tell there wasn't anything on earth so nice as being lovers. But this is lots better—all the nice part of it and none of the stupid part—for I suppose they were going to be married."

John looked at her curiously.

"Joy, did you never have a friend of your own age, or any companions but those old people of yours?"

She shook her head, smiling.

"Never any."

"That accounts for you, I suppose," said he with a sigh, which puzzled Joy very much. She had accepted as gospel John's order not to be afraid of him; and she was talking to him as if he were confidant, father and sister, all in one. That it might be treatment a

very attractive man wasn't used to never dawned on her, because she had nothing to check up by.

"Do I need accounting for?" she inquired, with another of the sidelong smiling glances he approved of.

She really wanted to know, but she was so contented with life as it was then that she did not feel particularly distressed over it. Her trial lover took another look at her and decided that perhaps she didn't need to be accounted for, after all. She was wearing the little golden-brown suit she clung to, with its little cap to match, and her cheeks were flushed with the heat of that September day. It was as interesting to watch her develop one and another little way, he decided, as it would have been to observe an intelligent child.

That there was some slight difference in his mind between her and a bona fide intelligent child was proved by that fact that he would just as lief that Philip had not interrupted them just then: though the interruption was done with all Philip's natural grace.

He was mussed and rather dusty, and the front of his blue Oliver Twist suit bore an unmistakable pawmark on its bosom.

"John," he said earnestly, "if you don't hurry, Foxy will have been alone quite a while. Mother says I mustn't stay wiv him any longer, and he doesn't seem to think brakemen is people a bit."

Joy gave a little gurgle of laughter. It reminded her of Mr. James Arthur Gosport and how he loved

brakemen. How shocked he would have been at the pedigreed Foxy! She began to tell John about it, then stopped herself.

"But you want to go and sit with the dog," she said, as they laughed over it; for Philip was standing, silent and reproachful, till John should do his duty by the beloved animal.

"I don't want to a bit," said John frankly, "but I suppose my reputation with Foxy demands it."

He rose reluctantly, quoting from the "Bab Ballads":

> "'*My own convenience counts as* nil:
> *It is my duty, and I will!*'"

"Come out on the rear platform," said Phyllis, joining Joy as she stared after the tall figure and the little one passing out of the car. "It's the only cool spot. I suppose in the smoking car, where Allan is, the windows are open, but this place is too hot to live in. I wonder if there's any blue-law that forbids opening chair-car windows. I always forget to tell Allan to get day-coach tickets on this line, and it never occurs to him to do anything but perish in the parlor-cars, having been brought up in the lap of luxury. So we suffer on."

Phyllis laughed as she led the way out to the little platform, and held to the rail with one hand, letting

the wind sweep past her. She looked like anything but suffering.

"Oh, isn't it one of the loveliest days that ever was!" she breathed, turning to Joy.

"It's one of the loveliest times that ever was," Joy responded impulsively. "Oh, Phyllis, I'm so glad I met you!"

"Glad you met John, dear child," Phyllis corrected. "So am I. Glad *I* met *you,* I mean, and particularly glad John did. We were all *so* afraid he was going to marry Gail Maddox. I think he was getting a little worried over it himself!"

Joy looked up, startled.

"You mean—he wasn't really thinking of marrying some one else?"

Phyllis anchored her hat more securely, and smiled down out of the white cloud her veil made around the rose and blue and gold of her.

"He seems principally to have been thinking, in his monumental silence, of marrying you. But Gail was certainly 'spoken of for the position.'"

"Gail!" Joy murmured worriedly.

She had never thought of this complication.

Phyllis nodded.

"She's as nice as possible, but everybody could see how fearfully they wouldn't fit—everybody, that is, but the parties concerned. Gail's one of those people who are always dashing about aimlessly, doing some-

thing because she didn't do it yesterday. And John's the kind of a man—well, you know the kind he is: dependable, authoritative, angel-kind, and deadly clever. He's not a *bit* like Allan," said Allan's wife, as if Allan were the standard pattern for men. "If I didn't adore Allan too much to be so mean, I could fool him a dozen times a day, and so could any woman. If it meant John's life I don't believe I could hoodwink him, any more than I could another girl. I suppose it comes from diagnosing cases."

"We're almost at Wallraven, Phyllis," Allan spoke from behind them before Joy could answer. "Better come in and get your caravan in order."

"Coming," said Phyllis simply; and went in to assort her babies.

But Joy had seen the look that passed between the husband and wife, and it made her a little lonely for the moment. You could see that they belonged to each other, and how glad they were of it. And Joy—well, she was only somebody's pretend-sweetheart. Maybe nobody would ever look at her that way. . . .

She clasped her hands together as she always did when she thought hard, and felt the touch of her wishing ring. Her heart lightened, for she remembered how kind John had been to her. Surely he couldn't pretend to be so pleased about it if he weren't. And if there was another girl, why, she was only having John borrowed from her.

"It won't hurt her a bit," Joy decided. "And if she really is flyaway, and all that, maybe a little anxiety will be good for her."

In Joy's heart, too far down for her to find it herself, was a tiny bit of defiance, and the old, old feeling, "If she wants him, let her come and get him!" But she wasn't in the least aware of it, and went back to her seat feeling like an angel.

She found there John, looking perfectly content with life, gathering up her belongings and his, and obviously expecting to make her his complete care. When John Hewitt took charge of anybody they were taken charge of all over; not fussily or so it was a nuisance, but just comfortably, so that every care vanished.

They got off the train, into the peace and spaciousness of open country. The station was behind them, a little, neat stone station like a toy dropped down on the old-fashioned New England countryside. Joy caught her skirts clear of the car steps and descended, John guarding her. She smiled down at him before she sprang to the platform, and he smiled up at her. To any one not in the secret they seemed like as real lovers as possible.

As Joy stood there, waiting a moment, she felt arms coming round her from behind, and, turning, startled, she found herself in the embrace of a tall, white-haired

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woman with John's kind steel-gray eyes and an impulsiveness not at all like John's.

"This is the first chance I have ever had to kiss my daughter," said a swift, soft-noted voice—not at all like an old lady's—"and I've been wanting one for thirty-odd years. I'm John's mother, my dear, and I forgive you both on the spot for keeping me in the dark. I know just why John did it. He didn't want parties given over him, as he's always saying. But I've foiled him completely. . . . My dear, he's picked me out exactly the sort of thing I wanted!"

Joy kissed Mrs. Hewitt back willingly. This was just the kind of mother she had always wanted, too. She spoke out what she thought, before she thought.

"Are you Grandmother's Grace Carpenter?" she asked. "Why, you're not a bit old!"

Her mother-in-law laughed as she turned to greet her son, still holding fast to one of Joy's hands.

"I know you don't like being kissed in public, Johnny, but you know I always do it, anyhow. You good boy, to actually tell her I liked having my first name used! He never would do it, you know, Joy, dear. Phyllis and Allan—where are those two? I have their motor, commandeered it to come down in. Mine had the fender bitten off by the village trolley last night. Oh—they're putting in the children."

Joy had scarcely time to answer, but she let her mother-in-law sweep her along, and install her in the

motor between herself and John, who was holding Angela because Angela insisted.

As they sped down the country lanes Joy sat very still, trying to forget that this happy time would ever stop. Giving up John was bad enough—maybe he would be friends with her afterwards if she was lucky —but giving up John's mother seemed almost too much to ask of any girl.

"I'm *sure* I'll never happen on a mother-in-law like this again!" thought Joy.

"How's Gail, Mother?" she heard John ask quite calmly as they turned down another leafy lane.

She flushed up, deep rose-red, as she listened for the answer.

"Just back from the city, and more rambunctious than ever," said Mrs. Hewitt briskly.

Joy clasped her hands over the wishing ring and looked off—anywhere—not to look at John or his mother. And in her anxiety she heard a husky whisper from the seat behind her, where Viola was restraining Philip and Foxy from jumping out into the landscape.

"Don't you fear, honey. Mighty hard work getting a man away from a red-haired girl!"

Where her courage came from Joy did not know. But as she heard Viola she sat up straight. And a light came into her eyes—the light of battle.

CHAPTER SIX

ROSE GARDENS AND MEN

"You can come in by the front door, if you'd rather be grand," offered Phyllis, "but the only door we can coax the car anywhere near is the side one. And we had to cut that through."

They halted at a contented-looking old Colonial house set far back from the country road. The grounds were large, and one whole side of them was shut off from the road by a high Sleeping Beauty sort of hedge that hid everything except one inquisitive red rose, sticking its head out between masses of box. The other side of the house was surrounded by a green lawn set with tall old trees. A tennis-court showed at the back, and closer by a red-banded croquet-mallet lay beneath a tree, with a red ball nestling to it. The whole place looked sunny and leisurely and happy and spacious and welcoming.

As the motor, after teetering itself cautiously down a side path that had never in the world been made for motors, stopped, the side door Phyllis had referred to opened, and a beautiful white wolfhound sprang out and into the car, where he was welcomed

tumultuously by the children, and greeted without undue enthusiasm by Foxy, whose disposition had not yet recovered from the baggage car.

Every one piled out, and Philip and the dogs raced back into the house and to the greetings of a couple of half-visible colored servants.

Phyllis, alighting more leisurely, turned, with the graciousness that was peculiarly hers, and smiled from the doorway at Joy.

"Welcome, my dear," she said. "And I hope you'll never go away from our village for good again!"

Joy's throat caught a little. She was only a pretender, a little visitor in this Abode of the Blest. But, anyway, the Abode of the Blest was here for a while, and she in it. She looked from Phyllis' kind, lovely face in the doorway to John, beside her on the step. His face was as kind as Phyllis' and as handsome in its grave way. For a month she was going to be happy with them, and she could save up enough happiness, maybe, for remembering through years of life in the twilight city house. She was here, and loved and free and young. Lots of people never got any happiness at all. Joy knew that from the way she heard them talk. They seemed to mean it usually. A whole month, then, was *lots* to the good. She would take every bit there was of it—yes, love and all!

She put her two hands in Phyllis' impulsively, and kissed her as they went in. The others followed.

Philip, gamboling rejoicingly about the house with his dear dogs, bounded toward her as she made her way toward the stairs.

"I got something to ask you when you get your face washed and come down," he called to her. "'Member to 'mind me."

"All right!" she called back heedlessly, as she followed Mrs. Hewitt up the wide, shallow-stepped staircase. Mrs. Hewitt seemed to have constituted herself a committee of welcome, and was accepted on all sides as being about to stay to dinner.

All the rooms in the house were sunny, and at the window of Joy's there tapped a spray from a rambler rose. There was so much to see and hear and smell out the window that Joy had a hard time getting dressed. She put back on her gray silk. Grandmother had packed all the pretty picture-frocks for her, but she didn't feel as if she could stand wearing any of them yet; but she was beginning to think that these people supposed she had only two dresses. To tell the truth, she was getting a little tired of wearing first the gray and then the brown and then doing it over again. But she pinned the spray of roses that had tempted fate by sticking itself in her window, on the bosom of her dress, and ran down.

She found that, much as she had looked out the window, she was earlier than the others. Phyllis and Allan were nowhere to be seen, and Mrs. Hewitt she

knew was above stairs yet, because she had heard her singing to herself as she moved about the next room. Philip, exempted from an early bedtime by special dispensation and the knowledge that he wouldn't go to sleep this first night, anyway, was being wisely unobtrusive in a corner of the room, spelling out a fairy-book. The only other occupant of the room, Joy saw, was her trial fiancé.

It was the first time she had been all alone with John since their talk in the wood. He had been sitting on the floor by Philip, explaining to him some necessary fact about the domestic habits of dragons. He made a motion to rise when she came in.

"Oh, please don't get up!" she begged.

She had been embarrassed when she first saw him, the only occupant of the room (for small children are most mistakenly supposed not to count); but, curiously enough, when she saw that he was a little embarrassed, too, her own courage rose, and she came over quite at her ease, sinking down at the other side of the convenient Philip.

"You asked me to remind you of something you wanted to say to me, Philip," she said.

Philip looked up from his book amiably.

"Yes, there was," he said encouragingly, if somewhat vaguely. "Thank you for aminding me. I just wanted to find out—if you're sure you don't mind telling me—why you never make a fuss over John.

You know, people that marry each other do. I saw two once—ever so long ago, but I know they did. Lots."

Joy blushed, but when you've come to Arcady for only a month, and it really doesn't matter afterwards, you're very irresponsible.

"Why, you see, Philip, the girl isn't supposed to start making the fusses. You'd better ask John about it—some other time—" she added hastily.

But as she spoke she had to hold her lips hard to keep them straight, and looked out of the corner of one black-lashed eye at John, sitting at his ease on Philip's other side. She had never found him at a loss, and she desired, most unfairly, to see what he would do with this impertinence.

"Why don't you, John?" inquired Philip inevitably.

Joy had been so sure John would get out of it with his usual immovable poise that her own remarks hadn't occurred to her in the light of provocation. But Dr. Hewitt evidently looked at it that way, because what he said was quite terrifyingly simple:

"If you'll move a little, Philip."

Philip courteously shoved himself back on the floor from between them, and for the second time in her life Joy found herself being kissed by a man.

"I didn't mean that you really *had* to start things right away," she heard Philip, dimly, explaining in

a tone of courteous apology, "only when you wanted to, you know."

"It's all right, old fellow," John assured him kindly. "I didn't mind."

It was, indeed, quite a brotherly kiss, but even at that—and in the resigned way John had explained it there was little room for a girl's being excited—Joy felt a little dazed. But she didn't intend to let John see it. She had rented him for the month, so to speak, and, though it hadn't specially occurred to her, probably this sort of thing was all in the month's work. . . . It was as near as the wishing ring could bring her to a real lover. . . .

She raised her surprising eyes to him demurely.

"Thank you," she said with all apparent gratitude. "It was sweet of you to do that for Philip."

There was no answer possible to that, as far as she knew.

"You needn't say anything," she went on placidly, but with that spark of excited mischief still in her eyes. "Do you know, Dr. Hewitt, I'm getting to be much less afraid of you. You certainly have the *kindest* heart——"

Here the worm turned. He also got up off the floor, and stood over her, toweringly, as he answered.

"I haven't a kind heart one bit," he said—and was there a certain sharpness in his voice?—"kissing you isn't at all hard——"

"Compared to lots of messy things you have to do in the exercise of your profession?" finished Joy contemplatively, cocking her bronze head on one side, and looking up at him sweetly, her arms around her knees. "*I* know. I've read about them—I've read a lot. You have to give people blood out of your strong, bared right arm, and cure them of diphtheria, and scrub floors —oh, no, it's the nurses do that. 'A physician's life is *not* a happy one!'"

She laughed, as he stood severely there above her. She had not realized before that she knew how to tease anybody, least of all the demigod who had rescued her from the shadows of the reception-halls at home. But his kissing her had done something to her—it always seemed to, she reflected—and his matter-of-fact explanation of it had exasperated her to the point of wanting to pay him back.

"He might at least have *said* he liked it," she told herself petulantly. And then after she had laughed, she remembered that if he did anything too much—if she went too far—he could speak the word and send her flying out of fairyland. . . . But he wouldn't do that. He was ever so much too noble, thank goodness!

"People who are noble, really are a comfort," she said cheerfully, aloud. "Dr. Hewitt, if you don't mind, my spray of roses got caught in your coat. Of course, if you really want it——"

He detached the spray with something like a jerk and dropped it down into her lap.

Really you could hardly blame a man for being annoyed a bit. To have a gentle, grateful little girl you had nobly helped, suddenly perk up and turn into something quite different—something dimpling and impish and provocative—would be disturbing to nearly any man.

John had no means of knowing, of course, that Phyllis had said anything about Gail Maddox, though he might have remembered, at least, that Joy had red hair and was likely to have a little of the fire that goes with it. He looked at her all over again, as if there was somebody else sitting on the floor where little Joy Havenith had been—somebody rather surprising. He began to wonder about this young person, with a distinct interest.

"We've found her!" announced Mrs. Hewitt, much to the surprise of the three in the dining-room, who had not lost anything.

She and Phyllis came in with a triumphant air, and Angela. Angela was in Phyllis' arms, and adorably asleep, with her goldy-brown lashes on her pink cheeks and a look of angelhood in every round, relaxed curve.

"Found her?" inquired John, turning from his position looking down at Joy. "Who was lost?"

"Do you mean to say," Phyllis demanded, "that

you didn't know we'd lost Angela for the last half-hour?"

"Well, she got lost so very—er—noiselessly," apologized John, "that it escaped our attention. But she doesn't look as if it had worn on her much," he added, brightening.

"It didn't," Phyllis answered with an irrepressible laugh, "it wore on us! I expect Allan's still hunting the grounds over for her—he and the gardener. The gardener always uses a wooden rake with a pillow tied to its teeth."

Allan entered at one of the long windows as she spoke.

"Oh, you found her," he remarked. "I thought she wouldn't have been out of the house."

"Where was she?" demanded Philip, John, and Joy in a polite chorus, surrounding the center of attraction, who slept on.

"Under the guest-room bed," said Phyllis, putting her daughter down on a couch as she spoke, and going over to the table, where she struck the bell for soup, and sat down.

"I crawled under," interjected Mrs. Hewitt proudly, looking every inch a duchess as she said it, "and there she was! She had eaten every bit of cheese from the set mousetrap under it; I forgot to tell you, Phyllis."

"Good gracious!" said Phyllis as the rest sat down

about the table. . . . "Well, if it hasn't hurt her so far, it mayn't at all. I'm not going to wake her out of a seraphic slumber like that just to ask her if she has a pain."

"You don't let *me* eat cheese at night," said Philip aggrievedly here, looking up from his plate. "And I knew that mousetrap was there, and I never touched a scrap of it. It was set the day we went away from the chickenpox."

"You're a very high-minded child," said his father soothingly.

"And there's charlotte russe for your dessert, Master Philip," whispered the waitress: at which Philip forgot his wrongs and brightened visibly.

The meal went on rather silently after this, because everybody was rather hungry. Philip grew drowsier and drowsier, till Viola stole in and led him away, "walking asleep." The grown people went on talking and laughing around the table.

"With nobody to hush them so he could make a literary criticism," Joy thought happily.

Mrs. Hewitt tore herself away with obvious reluctance, about ten or so, taking John with her. After that Phyllis said that she was sleepy, but not to let that make anybody else feel they had to be sleepy, too. Joy had been holding her eyelids up by main force for some time, because she hadn't wanted to miss any of the talk and laughter and delightful feeling of being grown up

and in the midst of things. So she went up to bed, almost as drowsily as Philip had before her.

Just as she was on the point of dropping off to sleep, with the wind blowing, flower-scented, across her face, she remembered something that made her sit bolt upright in bed and think. There was going to be a grand affair for her at Mrs. Hewitt's house the very next night, and she hadn't a blessed thing to wear! Nothing, that is, but five art-frocks which she had determined in her heart never to wear again. But—the wind among the trees was very soothing, and the wishing ring lay loose and heavy on her finger.

"You'll look after it," Joy murmured drowsily to the ring, and went to sleep.

Philip wakened her the next morning. He was very clean and rosy from a recent bath, and he was curled on the quilt at her feet, staring intently at her.

"Did you know if you look hard at asleep folks' eyes they open?" he inquired affably. "You see they do. Yours did. Do you mind dogs on your bed, or Angela?"

Philip was always so perfectly friendly that Joy was very much at ease with him, which had never been her case before with children. But, then, she had never met any intimately before. She reached out a slim white arm from beneath the covers and pulled him down and kissed him—an operation which he bore with his usual politeness.

"I love dogs, and Angela," she told him. "And I don't mind them on the bed a bit, if your mother doesn't."

Philip assumed a convenient deafness as to the last clause, and whistled, whereat his slaves, Ivan, the white wolfhound, Foxy, and Angela, all appeared joyously and dashed across the floor, scrambling enthusiastically up on the white counterpane. They were almost too many for one three-quarters bed, and Joy, on whom most of the happy family was sitting, could have wished the dogs a little lighter, even while she gave Angela a hand up. Angela scrambled up with intense earnestness and loud little pantings, and, finally seated on a pillow in triumph, smiled broadly and charmingly, her golden head cocked to one side.

"Doggies went garden, 'is morning," she informed Joy, still smiling enchantingly. "Oo—a *big* hole!"

"She means they dug a hole," Philip translated. "You can't always tell when she's making up things that aren't so; but this is. It's there now, with worms in it, and a rosebush that fell in. But I washed all their paws in the bathtub," he added hastily, "and Angela's frock-front. Didn't I, Angel?"

"Fock-front!" said Angela, beaming and spatting herself happily in the region named.

Joy cast a wild look around her. Foxy lay across her at her waist line—yes, there were paw-marks all over the counterpane, and Ivan, who seemed to have

had more than his share of the cleansing, showed a distinct arc of wetness where his long body had lain at the foot of the bed.

Philip, following her eyes, slid unobtrusively from her side.

"I—I just thought you'd like to see the dogs, and the baby," he explained. "Most people do. Mother sent me to tell you it was nine o'clock, and would you like to get up?"

He made no further references to paws or washings. He merely whistled again to Angela and the dogs, who were reluctant, but struggled obediently down from the counterpane, leaving, alas, distinct traces in all directions.

"If you frow the covers back nobody'll see anything," he hinted from the doorway, and was gone.

Joy did not take his hint. Instead, she pulled the counterpane off bodily and put it in the window to sun, and then went on dressing. Things were so cheerful and sunny and funny in this house.

"Oh, John was right," she thought buoyantly, as she braided her ropes of hair. "Things do come right if you hope and wish and *know* they will!"

The glitter of the ring caught her eyes, in the mirror, between the bronze ripples of hair, and it reminded her of one thing that was *not* settled: her frock for the evening, this wonderful evening when a party was going to be given for just her!

She asked Phyllis about it as soon as breakfast—a somewhat riotous meal—was over. She was a little diffident, because she was sure that any sane grown-up person who was told that there were five good frocks you hated would tell you you should wear them. But Phyllis only suggested bringing them down and looking them over. So they did.

"They all have queer things all over them that nobody else wears except illustrations in historical novels, and they're all of very good materials," said Joy sadly, laying them out one by one. "And there isn't one I don't hate to wear. But I never could explain that to Grandmother, of course."

She looked at Phyllis with a wistful hope in her eyes. Phyllis thoughtfully lifted the yellow satin skirts of Joy's pet detestation.

"This is a lovely material," she said thoughtfully. "Is it the color you don't like?"

"N-no," Joy answered doubtfully. "It's the make." Then she burst out passionately. "I want to look frisky!" she declared. "I want to be dressed the way John's used to seeing girls. I—I want to look just as pretty and like folks as Gail Maddox!"

She checked herself, flushing and biting her lip. She hadn't meant to say that!

But Phyllis took it beautifully.

"No reason why you shouldn't look just exactly like folks," she soothed. "This is lovely, too, this

silver tissue. Goodness, what a lot of material there is in these angel sleeves!" . . . She held it up considering. . . . "Wait a minute, Joy, I think I read my title clear." She ran out of the room, coming back in a moment with a life-size dress-form in her arms, which she set down.

"Here's Dora, the dress-model," she said cheerfully. "She adjusts." In proof she began to screw Dora down and in to required proportions, measuring her by Joy, who watched operations with fascinated eyes.

"I never knew you could sew," she said.

"My father was a country minister," Mrs. Harrington explained, flinging the green frock, inside out, over the steely shoulders of Dora, the dress-frame. "I cook very nicely, if I do say it myself, and till I was seventeen I did every bit of my own sewing."

"And were you married at seventeen?"

"No," Phyllis answered, stopping a moment from her pinnings and speaking more gravely. "My father died then, and I went to work. I hadn't time to sew after that—I bought ready-made things. So when I *was* married—that was a long seven years afterwards —I did have such lovely times buying organdies and laces and things and cutting them out and making them! That was the summer Allan was getting well."

She stared off at the wall for a moment, as she knelt up against the green satin. "That was the love-

liest summer I ever had—excepting every one since."

She laughed a little, then prevented herself from further speech by putting a frieze of pins in her mouth and beginning to do something with the dress with them, one by one.

"Do you mind cutting into this?" she asked when that row was gone.

"The more the better!" said Joy with enthusiasm.

"It will make a stunning frock, with the silver net draped over the pale-green satin. . . . M'm. That silver iridescent girdle on the other dress—the violet—can I have that, too?"

Joy ripped and handed with tremulously eager hands, while Phyllis swiftly cut away the sleeves of the green dress and slashed a *décolletage,* and draped the net over it and pinned on the girdle.

"Try if you can get into that without being scratched," she invited, lifting the frock gingerly off Dora and dropping it over Joy. Then she wheeled her around to where she could see her reflection in the tall pier-glass between the windows.

"Of course, that's rough," she told her; "but what do you think of it, generally? Are there any changes you want?"

"Oh, not one!" Joy replied ecstatically, regarding the slim little green and silver figure in the glass.

"It needs to be shorter," meditated Phyllis aloud, and fell to pinning it up to the proper shortness.

Joy continued to look at it rapturously. It had been a straight, long gown, and all Phyllis had needed to do was to drape it with the net ripped from the other dress and shorten and cut it into fashionableness. It was charming—springlike and becoming, and, best of all, strictly up to date!

"Don't you think you'll feel equal to being the feature of the reception in that?" demanded Phyllis. "I certainly should in your place. . . . That is, if you have silver slippers."

"I have, and I think I do," said Joy gravely.

"Then I'll hand this over to Viola to put the finishing stitches in. Look out the window—do you see anything familiar coming up the path?"

Joy, in her pinned finery, looked, then snatched her clothes from the sofa, where they lay in state, and ran upstairs. John was coming along the path, and she didn't want him to know about her frock till it was all done.

She came down a moment later, brown-clad and demure, and looking so young and harmless that any man would have been sure his tilt with her, of the night before, was a dream. She greeted him shyly, with her lashes down.

"Isn't—isn't it a little early for you to be away from your patients?" she asked.

"My morning office hours are just over, and I'm

on my way to make some calls in the car. Want to come?" he asked.

"Thank you," said Joy. "That is, if you don't think I'd be in the way."

"If I thought you would be I wouldn't have asked you," said Dr. Hewitt matter-of-factly. "So run along and pin up your hair, child. I don't want people to think I've been robbing the cradle."

He smiled at her in a brotherly fashion, and Joy began to feel a little ashamed of herself for trying to tease him, even if he didn't seem to see it. She liked him so much, apart from any other feeling, that it was hard to be anything but nice and grateful to him—except when she thought of Gail Maddox.

"It just takes two hairpins," she informed him, coming over to him and holding up the ends of her braids. "You wind it round and pin it behind."

He took the hairpins and the braids, and quite deftly did as she asked him to.

"Hurry, my dear," he said authoritatively, yet with a certain note of affection in his voice that made Joy feel very comforted. As she flew to get her cap her heart gave a queer, pleasant sort of turn-over. His voice made her feel so belonging.

She sang as she went, and Phyllis and John smiled across at each other, as over a dear child.

"Oh, John, I'm so glad you chose such a darling!" said Phyllis warmly, putting her hands on his shoul-

ders, as "A Perfect Day" floated back to them from above. "You know, Johnny, even the best of men do marry so — so surprisingly. She might have been——"

"'She might have been a Roosian, or French or Dutch or Proosian,'" he quoted frivolously. "Well, Phyllis, I'm glad you approve of my—ah—choice. How long do you think it will take it to get its hat on?"

"Oh, you can laugh," Phyllis answered him, "but I know you're proud of her, just the same."

"Well, she's creditable," said John unemotionally, but with a little smile beginning to show at the corners of his mouth.

"I'm ready!" called Joy breathlessly from the top of the stairs, and ran down tumultuously. "Oh, Phyllis, can't I have some roses to take to John's sick people—the poor ones? I want them to like me!"

"Help yourself," Phyllis granted promptly.

"Not a bit of it," John contradicted her coolly. "You must teach them to love you for yourself alone. Come on, kiddie."

He tucked her hand under his arm and hurried her, laughing, down the drive. Phyllis ran after them with a too-late-remembered motor-veil, which she managed to convey into the car by the risky method of tying a stone in it and throwing the stone. It just missed John, and Joy nearly fell out, turning to wave thanks for it.

John threw his arm around her hastily to hold her in, and so Phyllis saw them out of sight.

"You needn't do that any more," observed Joy as they sped on. "There's nobody can see us now."

"That, with most people," observed John amusedly, "would be a reason for continuing to do it."

"M'm," said Joy in assent, as he removed his arm. "You see," she went on rather apologetically, "I never was engaged before, not even this much, and I probably shan't always do it right. . . . Do you think I shall?"

"Very well, indeed," answered her trial fiancé dryly. "I have always heard that when you were engaged to a girl she took the opportunity to torment you as thoroughly as possible. But I haven't any more personal experience of the holy bonds of affiancement than you have, my dear child."

Joy's heart suddenly reproached her for having teased such a kind person as this at all. She clutched his arm with such impulsive suddenness that the car almost left the road.

"John, I do want to be good to you! And I want to be as little trouble as possible! And I want to have you *like* me . . . and respect and admire me just the way that——"

"Just what way?" he inquired more gently.

"Never mind what way," Joy told him, coloring hotly. "Only if you'll please tell me what to do—it's

hard to say, but I'll try to explain what I mean. Haven't you always thought, just a little, when you hadn't anything else to think of, that sometime there'd be—a girl?"

John Hewitt looked straight before him for a moment, as the car sped smoothly down a country lane. Then he nodded.

"Yes," he said, and no more. He was not given to talking about his feelings.

"And you planned her—a little—didn't you?" Joy persisted. "I know you did—people do. Well . . . John—couldn't you tell me a little bit about how *She* was going to act—so I could act that way? It would be more comfortable for you, I think. And I—I want to."

For a moment she thought he was not going to answer at all. He looked down at her silently. Then he spoke, a little abruptly.

"I never planned her in much detail," he said. "She always seemed to be dressed in blue, or in white, and her hair was parted. She seemed to be connected with a fireplace," he ended inconsequently, and laughed a little at himself. "You see, I'm not an imaginative person."

"I only wanted you to let me play I was that girl for this month," Joy answered desperately, with her eyes down, speaking very low.

John, who had been staring down at her in a half-

puzzled way, looked as if he was suddenly reassured that she was only a little girl, after all—not a provoking firefly, but a wistful, unconscious child who only wanted to do her best to please.

"I want to be good," she said meekly.

"So you are," said John warmly.

"Am I?" she asked softly, looking up at him with wide blue eyes.

And—John was getting to do that sort of thing quite unnecessarily often—he laughed and bent toward her with every intention of kissing her again.

"Oh, that wasn't what I meant," she assured him. Then her mood suddenly changed. "John, you have what one of Grandfather's anarchist friends called a real from-gold heart. But you don't have to do that unless . . ."

"Unless what?" demanded John, quite coldly removing all of himself that he could from her half of the seat.

Joy's eyes fixed themselves on the distant scenery—excellent scenery, all autumn reds and yellows.

"I'll tell you the 'unless' tomorrow morning," she answered him sweetly, but none the less firmly.

"You are playing with me, Joy, I think," John answered in his most diagnostic tone—the exact tone in which he would have said, "You have smallpox, Joy, I think."

"Why, yes," she answered him demurely. "We were to, weren't we?"

"You'll have to wait out here a while; I have a case here," he told her in a voice which held a note of endurance.

She sat quite still, after suppressing a faint impulse to ask him if she should hold the motor. She leaned back and gave herself up to the country sights and sounds and scents, gently ecstatic.

"Oh, Aunt Lucilla!" she was saying inwardly. "You'd be proud of me!"

Joy was actually playing—he had said so—playing with a man!

CHAPTER SEVEN

A VERY CHARMING GENTLEMAN

"You look lovely," said Phyllis heartily. She herself was radiant in a rose satin that made her look, as her small son remarked ecstatically, like a valentine. "Mustn't it be horrid to be a man and always wear the same black clothes?"

"M'yes," answered Joy absent-mindedly. "If I look as nice as you do I don't have to worry. But—but will Gail Maddox be very much dressed?"

"She will," replied Phyllis decisively. "If I know Gail, she'll look like a Christmas tree. But don't let that weigh on your mind, dear child. Nobody could look better than you do, if Viola and I did combine two of your frocks into one. Could they, Viola?"

The colored girl, who had been doing the masses of Joy's bronze hair while her mistress, kneeling by the dressing-table, put the finishing touches to some frock-draperies, giggled.

"Well dressed? Why, Miss Joy looks like the vampire in the movie show!"

"Final praise!" sighed Phyllis. "You never told me I was as well dressed as a vampire, Viola."

"You couldn't live up to vampiring, nohow, Mrs.

Harrington, nor you shouldn't want to, not with that goldy hair of yours," said Viola reprovingly.

"Virtue is thrust upon me, in other words," said Phyllis. "Evidently you have possibilities of crime, Joy!"

They went down, laughing, to where Allan and John were waiting for them, Allan walking the floor in his usual quick, boyish fashion, John sitting at a table reading, by way of economizing time. Being a doctor, he had a way of snapping up odds and ends of time and doing things with them.

He looked up from his paper as Joy's light footsteps pattered down the stairs, and continued to look at her. The green and silver of her gown glittered and flowed around her. Viola had done her hair high, and the wealth of it showed more, even, than when it was down in its accustomed braids. Her surprising black brows and lashes, with the innocence of her blue eyes, and the half-wistful, half-daring expression she had, made her seem a combination of sophistication and childishness such as John had never seen before.

"Shall I do you credit?" she asked him softly over her shoulder, as he held her wrap for her.

Her heart beat hard as she said it. She felt as if she was going into open battle, and she wanted all the heartening she could get.

"Tell me now that you like me better than you do Gail Maddox!" was what she wanted to say. But she

knew she couldn't, not without being thought a cat. "I can't get over finding motors scattered all over everything!" was what she heard herself saying inconsequently instead as they went out. She did not dare give him time to answer her first impulsive question.

But he answered it just the same.

"You do me great credit, my dear. I never knew you were quite so beautiful." He said it gravely, but none the less sincerely. "It's very pleasant to remember that I have property rights to such a charming person."

Property rights! Joy's heart gave a little warm jump. If he could say that—if he could even seem to forget that she was only rented, so to speak . . .

Before she thought she had reached up and caught his hand in a warm, furtive grasp for a moment. She took it away again directly, but it had comforted her to touch him. He was so strong and so *there*. . . . Also, Viola's words comforted her; if she looked like a vampire, why, maybe, with the aid of the wishing ring and Aunt Lucilla's ghost, she could live up to it. Having her hair done as high and her dress cut as low as anybody's also gave her courage. Altogether it was, if not a perfectly self-assured, at least a very poised-looking little figure that came smiling into Mrs. Hewitt's embrace from the motor, with her lover close behind her, like a bodyguard.

"You little angel! You look perfect!" said her

mother-in-law-elect rapturously. "And you match my lavender grandeur perfectly. That's a sweet frock, Phyllis. Hurry down, girls, you want to have a little time to rest before you have to stand up for years and receive."

It was early still when they came down from the dressing-rooms, and no guests had arrived yet. So they settled themselves in the dining-room, informally, to wait and visit a little.

"One has *no* chance for fun with an earnest-minded son," Mrs. Hewitt complained amiably. "This is the first doings of any sort I have ever had that John was even remotely connected with. A nice little daughter that would dance and flirt and turn the house upside down—that was what I was entitled to—and I got a brilliant young physician who specializes on the *os innominata,* or something equally thrilling! I sometimes wonder how he ever found time to annex you, Joy!"

Joy colored. It was a random shaft, but it caught her breath. Then—"He didn't," she said gallantly. "I simply rubbed my ring and wished for him, and he came."

"I'll be bound he didn't come hard," said her *enfant terrible* of a prospective mother-in-law placidly. "Johnny, keep away from those cakes! They're for much, much later, and for your guests, not the likes of you!"

"They are excellent. We need moral support in our ordeal," returned her son, sauntering up, with his usual dignity unimpaired by a plate of fancy cakes in each hand. "Never mind your cruel mother-in-law, Joy. Take a lot—take two!"

"I will, anyway," interposed Allan placidly, reaching a long, unexpected brown hand over his friend's shoulder and securing three. "Phyllis and I need as much moral support as anybody."

"Phyllis is the only one who is minding her manners," Mrs. Hewitt observed with a firmness that she patently didn't mean in the least. "Phyllis, my dear, go get some of the sandwiches. We may as well lunch thoroughly. We have heaps of time before the 'gesses' get here, anyway."

They were all playing like a lot of children. Phyllis, flushed and laughing, raided the kitchen with her husband and came back with more kinds of sandwiches than Joy had known existed. They sat about on cushions on the floor, because the chairs had been taken out for dancing later, and the floor waxed. Joy laughed with the rest, and lunched sumptuously on the cakes the guests ought to have had, and thought for the thousandth time what an ideal mother-in-law was hers at the moment, and how many of the people in the world were the realest of real folks, and how much like Christmas every-day life was getting to be . . .

"I see you are eating up everything before the

really deserving poor arrive," said a slow, coolly amused voice behind Joy, who sat with her back to the entrance.

Joy did not need Mrs. Hewitt's equally calm "Good-evening, Gail. Since when have you been deserving?" to know who had entered.

"Came to help you receive," stated Gail further, still indolently, bringing herself further into the circle as she spoke, where Joy could see her. "I brought a stray cousin along—sex, male. I knew you wouldn't care—men are a godsend in New England towns. Here he is."

The cousin in question was evidently motioned to, for he appeared in the range of Joy's vision with a charming certainty of welcome, and the two merged themselves with the circle without more ceremony. They had evidently made their way to the dressing-rooms before coming to hunt for the family.

While Gail introduced her cousin a little more thoroughly, Joy gave her a furtive, but still more thorough, inspection. She seemed twenty-five or six. She was very slim, with lines like a boy more than a girl; sallow, with large, steady blue-gray eyes and heavy lashes, and lips that were so full that they were sullen-looking when her face was still. She was not unusually pretty—indeed, by Phyllis' rose-and-golden beauty she looked dingy—but she had something arresting about her, and the carriage and manner of a girl who

is insolently certain that whatever she says or does is perfect because she does it. She had on a straight blue chiffon frock, cut unusually low: so low that it was continually slipping off one thin shoulder. Allan confided to Joy afterward that Gail's shoulder-straps worried him to madness.

Joy watched Miss Maddox with fascinated eyes. "I'm so *young!*" she thought forlornly, "and all the rest of them are so dreadfully grown-up!"

She felt as if Gail Maddox, with her brilliant, careless sentences, and her half-insolent confidence, owned everybody there much more than *she* did: and she felt little and underdressed and outclassed to a point where even Gail might pity her, and probably did. . . . And if there is a more abjectly awful feeling than that the Other Girl pities you, nobody has discovered it yet. . . . Gail might even know how much of a pretender she was. If John—but no. John wasn't like that. He was—"fantastically honorable," she had heard Phyllis call it. John hadn't told—he wouldn't tell if his own happiness depended on it. . . . And Joy let her thoughts stray off into a maze of wondering as to whether she would rather have her self-respect saved by not having Gail know, or whether, if it would break John's heart to be separated forever from Gail, she oughtn't to tell him to tell.

Gail, lounging in a low chair she had dragged across the waxed floor in the face of all outcries, with one

electric-blue-shod foot stretched out before her, looked exactly the person you'd care least to have know anything they could scorn you about. She could scorn so well and so convincingly, Joy felt, listening to her. There wouldn't be a thing left of you when she got through.

"I feel as alone as Robinson Crusoe," thought Joy forlornly.

She rose restlessly and picked up the tray which had borne their illegal sandwiches, with the idea of carrying it and herself out of sight. She wanted a minute to brace herself in.

As she did it, Allan rose, too, unexpectedly, as he did most things. "Here, I'll take some of those," he offered, and helped her carry the débris out.

They set down their burdens on a pantry table, whence three scandalized maids whisked them somewhere else again, gazing the while reproachfully at the invaders.

"I haven't any use for that girl," stated Allan plainly, as they went back. "Don't let her fuss you, Joy."

Joy looked gratefully up at him. The whole world, then, didn't prefer Gail Maddox to her!

"She makes me feel exactly like a small dog that has stolen a bone and got caught," Joy acknowledged directly, with a little shamefaced laugh.

"She'll do her best in that line," responded Allan, who seemed to have no great affection for the lady. "Don't let her bother you. He's your bone—hang on to him. In short, sic 'em!"

They both laughed, and Joy came back with her bronze head high and an access of fresh courage. She sat down this time between John and the cousin, whose name she had not heard. But she began talking hard to him. Occasionally she tossed John, fenced in beside her, a cheerful word. He seemed perfectly satisfied at first, but the cousin did not. He wanted Joy all to himself, it appeared, and a fiancé more or less seemed to have no bearing on the case, as far as he was concerned.

Presently John woke up to this fact and began the effort to repossess himself of his lawful property. Joy cast a mischievous glance at Allan, sitting on the arm of his wife's chair (chairs had become the order of the day), and Allan grinned happily, by some means telegraphing the situation to Phyllis. Every one was happy except John, and perhaps Gail, who presently eyed the three and used her usual weapon of lazy frankness.

"It makes me furious to see both of you making violent love to Joy Havenith," she said indolently. "Clarence, go start the victrola, my good man. This must be put a stop to."

Clarence lifted himself from the floor by Joy, but

he calmly took her hand along with him, and raised her, too.

"She's going to christen the floor with me," he informed his cousin. "Come on, Miss Joy!"

The isolation that ordinarily doth hedge an engaged girl, where men are concerned, seemed to trouble Clarence not at all. He was, by the way, in spite of the fact that he would some day be too stout, one of the best-looking men who ever lived. He had a good deal of his cousin's lazy assurance—in him it sometimes verged on impudence, but never beyond the getting-away-with point—and a heavenly smile. His other name was, unbelievably, Rutherford, which almost took the curse off the Clarence, as he said, but not quite. And if he had gone into the movies he would have made millions, beyond a doubt.

He drew Joy across the floor with him, in her green-and-silver draperies, and began to wind the victrola, which had been tucked into a nook where Mrs. Hewitt had vainly hoped it would be quite hidden. There was to be an orchestra afterwards for the authorized dancing.

Clarence put on "Poor Butterfly," and encircling Joy proceeded to dance away with her.

"But I don't know how to dance," she gasped as she felt herself being drawn smoothly across the floor.

"That doesn't matter, Sorcerette, dear," said Clarence blandly. "Just let go—be clay in the hands

of the potter. I'll do the dancing for two. Hear me?"

Joy did as she was told, and—marvel of marvels!—found herself following him easily. She was really dancing!

"But why did you call me that?" she demanded, like a child, as she got her breath. To her apprehensive mind the name sounded as if Gail had not only learned her dark secret but had passed it on to her dear Cousin Clarence.

"Because you look it," said he promptly, in a voice that softened from word to word. ". . . Harrington is a good dancer, isn't he? Phyllis looks all right, but I fancy she guides hard. Those tall women often do. . . . Why, anybody with brows and lashes like yours, and hair that color, combined with that angelic please-guide-me-through-a-hard-world expression simply shrieks aloud for a name like that. A sorcerette is a cross between a seraph and a little witch. There's no telling what she might do to you!"

"Oh!" cooed Joy.

It sounded like a very happy "Oh," and Clarence, experienced love-pirate though he was, hadn't a way in the world of knowing that Joy's pleasure came of being still undiscovered, not of his winning ways.

She danced on with him to the very last note of the record, enraptured to find that she really could dance,

and came back to the end of the room where Mrs. Hewitt still sat; her eyes starry with delight.

"Oh, I can dance when I just go where the man takes me!" she cried. "I never knew I could!"

"You dance very well," said John's quiet voice from behind his mother's chair. "Will you dance with me now?"

Joy, regarding him, saw that he was vexed. Most people would not have noticed it, but very few of his moods escaped Joy. He was a little graver than usual, and his voice was quieter.

"If I can," she answered. "I thought you were dancing this with Miss Maddox."

"I didn't think it would show proper courtesy to my fiancée to dance first with some one else," John answered.

Clarence had set the music going again, and was swinging round the room with Gail. As it began, John, with no more words, drew Joy out on the floor with him.

She looked up in surprise at his words.

"Why—why, I didn't know I was that much of a fiancée to you. I thought probably you'd rather be with Gail. And—and I didn't know I was going to dance anyway. I didn't know I could!"

He looked down at her again, apparently to see whether she was in earnest, holding her off for a moment as they danced.

She hoped he would deny that he preferred being with Gail, but he did not.

"We are going through our month of relationship *right,*" he told her definitely, smiling, but looking down at her with the steady, steel-colored light in his gray eyes that she knew meant "no appeal." "Gail does not enter into it at all. But I admit that Rutherford's quickness put me in the wrong."

"If only," thought Joy, acutely conscious of his firm hold, "instead of laying down the law that way, he would let go and admit that he was angry!" For he certainly was, and it wasn't at all her fault, unless going where Clarence took her was a crime. John *hadn't* thought of dancing first. Was he the kind of person who always thought he was right even when he knew he wasn't? If so, maybe a month *was* long enough. . . . But the thought of the end of the month hurt, no matter how unreasonable she tried to think John, and she threw down her arms—the only way, if she had known, to make John throw down his.

"Are you angry at me?" she half whispered. "I —please don't be angry. Nobody ever was, and I don't want to be silly, but I don't believe I could stand it."

He swept her rhythmically on, but she could feel his arm relax and hold her more warmly, and his wonderful gray eyes softened again as they looked into hers.

"Poor little thing! I keep forgetting that you're just a child. Sometimes you aren't, you know."

"No, sometimes I'm not," Joy echoed. Then she laughed up at him impishly. "You say this thing is going to be done right?" she mocked. "Very well, then, when Mr. Rutherford is nice to me you ought to be nicer. When he sits down close to me and tells me I'm a sorcerette——"

"A what?" demanded John swiftly. "See here, Joy, I'm practically in charge of you, and you're very young, you know, and can't be expected to know much about men. Rutherford is attractive and all that, but he's a man I wouldn't trust the other side of a biscuit. Any man can tell you that. Allan——"

"He talks just like a poet," said Joy innocently. How could John know that this was an insult, not a compliment, in Joy's mind? She had seen any amount of Clarences—ignoring her, to be sure, but still saying Clarence things to others in her hearing—all her days.

"That may be," said John. "I'm no judge of poets, and I suppose you are. . . . See here, Joy, there's an inhabitant—two of 'em—coming in the doorway. Mother'll be wanting you to stand in a silly line and pass people along to her, or away from her, or something. Come here with me and we'll finish this. You're getting a wrong impression of what I mean."

Joy found herself being steered masterfully into a little semi-dark room that opened off the long parlor.

John planted her in a low chair in a corner and pulled up a stool for himself just opposite.

"They won't find us for at least ten minutes, unless we wigwag. Now—what's a sorcerette?"

His tone, in spite of his carelessness, betrayed a certain anxiety to learn. Joy answered him with fullness and simplicity.

"A sorcerette is somebody with coloring like mine, and a cross between a seraph and a little witch," she replied innocently. "That's what Clarence said. But I *think* he made up the name himself," she added conscientiously, as if that would be some help.

John grinned a little in spite of himself.

"I don't like the idea particularly of his making the name up himself," he remarked; "but there is something in what Rutherford said!"

"I'm very glad you think so," said Joy with a transparent meekness. "And now that you've found out, isn't it time you went back to your duties?"

He looked at her doubtfully, where she sat in the half-light with her head held high and her hands crossed on her green-and-silver lap. He could not quite make out her expression.

But he had not much more chance for cross-questioning, because guests were beginning to come thickly, and his mother was sending out agonized scouting parties for the feature of the evening.

Phyllis, knowing the rooms of old, discovered her.

She swooped down on the pair, where they were sitting in the little dim room.

"You wretched people, this is no time for that sort of thing!" she exclaimed, shoving them before her. "Please try to remember that you will, in all likelihood, spend a lifetime together. Joy, three severe New England spinsters have already taken Gail Maddox for you. Hurry!"

The suggestion was quite enough, as Phyllis may have known it would be. Joy whisked into her place, which was opposite the double doors, between Mrs. Hewitt and Phyllis, and taking her burden of white chrysanthemums on one arm, proceeded to be as charming to her future patients-in-law as she knew how.

Mrs. Hewitt and Phyllis cast glances of astonished admiration at each other over her head. They neither of them had thought of Joy as anything but a sweet child, or an affectionate child—a darling, but shy and unused to the world. But she was managing her share of the evening's pageant as if she had run a salon for twenty years. It did not occur to them that the explanation was that she practically had been brought up in one. She had been a part of the bi-weekly receptions given to the small and great of the earth by Havenith the poet ever since she was old enough to come into the parlors and could be trusted not to cry or snatch cake.

"Good gracious, Joy, *where* did you learn to drive

people four-in-hand this way?" breathed Phyllis admiringly, in a lull. "I *know,* if I'd had to talk to two Miss Peabodys and three Miss Brearleys and a stray Jones *all* at once, at least five of them would have hated me forever after. And you kept them going like a juggler's balls!"

"They're not half as hard as the people at Grandfather's afternoons," answered Joy. "He had almost every kind of person—everybody wanted to see him, you know, and he felt it his duty to gratify as many as he could, he said. Oh, Phyllis, *ten* Brearleys and Peabodys are nothing to trying to make three Celtic poets and a vers-librist talk pleasantly to each other!"

"You're a darling," said Phyllis irrelevantly.

"I see you've been working virtuously hard," put in Gail pleasantly, sauntering up. "Now, *I* gave up being noble-hearted to the uninteresting some time ago. There's very little in it. I collected a suitor or so early in the evening, and we've been telling each other what we really thought of all the worst guests, in the little room off. You ought to hear John's description of——"

"She shan't—it's not for your young ears," said Clarence possessively from where he stood, a little behind Gail. Gail had three men with her—Clarence, John, and a slim youth who looked younger than he proved to be, and who answered to the name of Tiddy.

All Joy's feelings of triumph and innocent satisfac-

tion in having won the liking of Mrs. Hewitt's guests faded. She felt as Gail had made her feel before—foolishly good and ridiculously young and altogether unsuccessful in life. For a moment the mood held her in a very crushed state of mind: then she caught Clarence's eyes fixed upon her with a look of amused admiration. It spurred her.

"I've been doing my duty by my future lord and master," she said lightly. "But now you put it that way, he doesn't sound like a worthy cause a bit."

The men laughed, though Joy's words hadn't sounded particularly witty to herself. "I'm going to abjure duty now," she went on hurriedly. "The orchestra's playing that thing people can dance me to——"

She held her hand and arm gracefully high, in the old minuet pose, and laughed up at Clarence. *He* wasn't supposed to be her lover, and yet he saw through Gail when John didn't——

"By Jove, I can do the minuet!" he said eagerly. "Can you, Miss Joy?"

She smiled and nodded.

"Grandma told me all about it,
Taught me so I could not doubt it,"

she sang softly.

"We'll do it—we'll do it for the happy villagers!" proclaimed Clarence.

"Here, Tiddy, go cut a girl out of the herd, and find Harrington, too. We're the bell-cows. All you others have to do is to obediently follow us—the men follow me and the women tag around after Miss Joy—which last seems wrong, but can't be helped."

"Not at all," said John amiably. "Far be it from me to seem to steal your thunder, Rutherford, but I, too, was in the village pageant last year, and I minuet excellently. All my grateful patients said so. You know, if you led off, they might take you for the man who's going to marry Miss Havenith."

Clarence couldn't very well do or say anything to his host, but he looked far from pleased as John took Joy's hand and quietly led her into line. Tiddy came up just then with a pretty, dark little girl whom he had selected with great judgment from the guests as being just of a height between Joy and Gail. He had also enlisted the orchestra, for it began to play "La Cinquantaine" as they all took their places facing each other. They were all laughing, even Clarence. The guests, catching the spirit of the thing, began to laugh and applaud, and—it seemed like magic that it could be done so swiftly—formed two more sets in the rest of the room, while the elders, against the wall, watched approvingly.

"I thought nobody but me danced minuets any more," Joy whispered to John as, her eyes alight with

happiness, she crossed him in the changes of the lovely old dance.

"There happened to be a historical pageant here last summer," he explained to her, "and there were eight minuet sets in the Revolutionary episode, so we had to learn. Mother hounded me into it. I'm glad now she did."

"Why?" inquired Joy innocently the next time she met him.

"I like to maintain my rights," he answered with a little gleam of fun in his eyes.

But Joy felt fairly certain that the gleam of fun had behind it a gleam of decision. Certainly John's motto was, "What's mine's mine!"—even when it was rented.

They finished to applause, and as the orchestra ended its minuet it slid on into a modern dance, and so did each of the couples, dancing on out on the floor.

Joy sank down at the end of the waltz on a seat by the wall, with John beside her.

He bent over her.

"Having a good time, kiddie?" he asked her gently. She nodded, her eyes like stars.

"Oh, I'm *people,* at last!" she said with a soft exultance. "I've always looked on and looked on, like a doll or a mechanical figure—and I'm real—I'm in the midst of things! And it's all you and the wishing

ring! . . . John, did you see? Your people—they really liked me!"

"Of course they did, you little goosie," he told her, smiling down at her. "You have more personal charm than almost any girl I ever knew. I don't know any one who doesn't like you."

"Gail doesn't," Joy ventured.

John shook his head.

"You don't understand Gail," he said. "She's a mighty brilliant girl. She doesn't often like other girls, I admit that—but she took to you. I could see it."

"Could you?" flashed Joy. "Men see so much! . . . She's beckoning to you."

She flung her head back angrily. Nobody likes to be told she doesn't understand another girl—and the fact that the girl is mighty brilliant doesn't make you feel better about it.

"I'll be back in just a moment," said John obliviously, and went with what seemed to Joy unnecessary docility.

She stood there alone, her hands clasped hard, her head up—to all appearance a vivid, triumphant little figure. Her heart was beating like mad and her cheeks burnt. She had just found out something about herself, something that a wiser, older woman would have known a long time ago: as long ago as when the Wishing-Ring Man stood, the light glinting on his fair hair

and sturdy shoulders, in the opening of Grandfather's hall door.

She was in love with John—furiously, wildly, heart-breakingly in love with him. And she was going to have to live close by him for a month, knowing that, and keeping him from knowing it—and then go away from him and never see him any more.

"This is our dance, Sorcerette," said Clarence's voice in her ear.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A FOUNTAIN IN FAIRYLAND

Joy had supposed, when she finally went to sleep at three in the morning, that she would waken with all the excitement gone and feeling very unhappy. She had always heard that it made you unhappy to be in love.

Instead, she opened her eyes with the excitement of it all still pulsing through her. The fact that John was in the world and she could care for him seemed almost enough to account for the sense of happiness that possessed her as she pattered over to the window and looked out. And what little more was needed to account for her exhilaration could be found in the wonderful September morning outside. There probably *were* troubles somewhere or other, such as darkened city parlors, minor poets, and sophisticated seekers after John, but somehow she and they didn't connect. The air was so tingling and sunny, and the garden was so beautiful, and being young and free and in the country was so heavenly that she dressed and ran down, and sang along the garden paths as she picked herself a big bunch of golden chrysanthemums and purple and pink asters.

Nobody else, apparently, was stirring yet. Joy was beginning to feel hungry, so she strayed into the dining-room, to see whether by any chance anybody else was down.

Phyllis was just coming into the dining-room, with her son frolicking about her.

"How do you feel after your triumph last night?" she asked. "Dead; or do you want another party this morning? I was proud of you, Joy. Everybody told me how pretty you were, and how charming, and how intelligent it was of me to be a friend of yours."

Joy flushed with genuine pleasure.

"Oh, was I—did they?" she asked. "Phyllis, it was *lovely!* . . . And think of being able to dance like that without knowing how! That was just a plain miracle, if you like!"

"Good-morning, Joy," said Allan, coming in at this point.

He sat down with them and attacked his grapefruit.

"I see I'm two laps behind on breakfast. Philip, you young rascal, where's my cherry?"

Philip giggled uncontrollably.

"Why, Father, you ate it yourself! *You* ate it while you said good-morning to Joy!"

"You seem to have made one fast friend, Joy," pursued Allan, dismissing the subject of the cherry for later consideration. "Rutherford confided to me

last night that he thought he had been working too hard; he isn't returning to his native heath for a month more. His aunt's been pressing him to stay on, and he thinks he will. He's coming over to see me this morning. He's devoted to me," stated Allan sweetly. "There's nothing he needs more than my friendship. He explained it to me."

Phyllis and he both laughed.

"You always did have winning ways, Allan," said his wife mischievously. "When is John expected to drop in? He, too, loves you—don't forget that!"

Allan grinned.

"Poor old Johnny has to look after his patients. He can't very well snatch a vacation in his own home town. It's a hard world for gentlemen, Joy!"

Phyllis looked from one to the other of them with an answering light of mischief in her eyes.

"I suppose John could take anybody he liked to hold the car, couldn't he?" she said demurely. "In fact—he has!"

"If you mean me," answered Joy, "he was very severe with me yesterday. John is bringing me up in the way I should go!" The feeling of vivid excitement was still carrying her along, and she laughed as she answered them.

Allan looked at her critically.

"H'm!" he said thoughtfully. "I seem to have a feeling that he won't bring you such an amazing dis-

tance, at that—short time as I have known you. Did you say popovers this morning, Phyllis?"

"Popovers," nodded Phyllis, "and some of Lily-Anna's fresh marmalade."

"An' little dogs!" broke in Philip enthusiastically. "Oh, Father, don't you just *love* little dogs?"

His mother tried to look troubled.

"Allan, don't you think you could teach Phil, by precept or example, that they really are sausages?" she asked. "The other day at Mrs. Varney's we had them for luncheon, and he said, 'I'd like another pup, please!' And she was shocked to the heart's core."

"It's such a nice convenient name," pleaded Allan. "Joy, I have to waste most of the morning talking over the long-distance 'phone to my lawyer. I shall spend an hour discussing leases, and two more bullying him and his wife into coming out to visit us. You will readily see that I can't entertain my new-found soulmate at the same time. I don't suppose you could offer any suggestions about his amusement?"

"Solitaire," suggested Joy demurely. "Or you might give him a book to read."

Allan threw back his head and laughed.

"Excellent ideas, both!" he said, "and truly original. He shall have his choice!"

"You have the kindest hearts in the world," said Phyllis, summoning the waitress. "Allan, before you finish that million-dollar conversation to Mr. De Guen-

ther, please call me. I want to speak to him a minute, too."

"I'll call you," he promised.

They drifted off, Phyllis to attend to her housekeeping, Allan to his long-distance leases, and Philip to find Angela, whom he never forgot for long. She had breakfast with her nurse, and Philip felt it was time he looked her up. He adored his little sister, and spent the larger part of his days in teaching her everything he had been taught, which was sometimes hard on Angela, who obeyed him implicitly.

As for Joy, she strayed out into the garden again. The feeling of intense, happy aliveness in a wonderful world was still on her, and she wanted to be alone to think things out—to think out especially the thing she had discovered last night—and what to do about it.

It was as warm as June by this time, for the sun was getting higher, and she went slowly down the paths with the sun shining on her hair and making it look like fire, breaking, as she went, a few more flowers to pin in her dress. She had put on one of her old picture-frocks, a straight dull-cream wool thing that she wore in the mornings at home, girdled in with a silver cord about the hips. She fitted the garden exceedingly well, though nothing was further from her thoughts.

At the far end, among a tangle of roses and beneath a group of shade-trees, the Harringtons had set a little

fountain, a flat, low-set marble basin with a single jet of water springing high, and falling almost straight down again. Its purpose was to cool the air on very hot days, but it always flowed till frost, because it was so pretty Phyllis never could bear to have it shut off. Joy loved the half-hidden, lovely place, though she had only had one glimpse of it before, and she sat down by it and began to try to think things out. She had a much harder thinking to do than she'd had for a long time.

"A 'hard world for gentlemen'!" meditated Joy, and laughed as she trailed one hand in the water. "It's a much harder one for ladies, if Allan but knew it!"

She bent over, half-absently, to watch the water in the basin. It fascinated her, the flow of it, and it helped her to reason things out. There were several things that needed reasoning.

To begin with—there was no use saying it wasn't so, for it was—she was in love with John. . . . Her heart beat hard as she looked down into the water and said the words in her mind. It would have been lovely to do nothing but sit there and think of him. There were so many different wonderful things he had for her to think about; his steady eyes that changed from warm-gray to steel-gray, and back, and could look as if they loved you or hated you or admired you or fathered you, while the rest of his face told nothing at all; the little gold glint in his fair hair and the way it

curled when it was damp weather; his square, back-flung shoulders; the strong way he had of moving you about, as if you were a doll—the way his voice sounded when she said certain words——

Joy pulled her thoughts from all that by force.

"Clarence Rutherford calls me a sorcerette," she thought, "and I suppose I must be. This must be being one. But, oh, I *have* to think how I can get John to love me back!"

It looked a little hopeless, to think of, at first. He was so old and wise and strong, compared to her, just a nineteen-year-old girl who had never had even one lover to practise on! Something Gail had said the night before came back to her—one of the girl's half-scornful, half-amused phrases.

"Barring a male flirt or so like Clarence over there," she had vouchsafed, "men *are* such simple-minded children of nature! All you have to do is to treat them like hounds and tell them what to do, and they'll do it."

Joy could scarcely imagine treating John like a hound. She was too afraid of him, except once in a while when she had a burst of daring. But, at any rate, if she went on the principle that John was simple-minded and could always be depended on to think she felt the way she acted, things would be lots easier.

"If only I can keep the courage!" she prayed.

But as to details. She would have to let John see

enough of her to want her about. But—not so much that he got tired of it.

"I wonder how much of me would tire him?" she said. Anyway—Joy dimpled as she thought of it—he seemed to want to be the only one. He didn't seem to want Clarence around. They all kept telling her Clarence was a flirt—as if she wanted him to be anything else! It's a comfort sometimes to know that a man can be depended on not to have intentions. . . . Very well, she would try to make John jealous of Clarence. Not enough to hurt him—it would be dreadful to hurt him!—but enough to make herself valuable.

"It's going to be very hard," she decided, "because all I want is to do just as he says and make everything as happy for him as I can. Oh, dear, why are men like that!"

But she was fairly certain that they were. They were like that in the books, and Gail had said so. Gail apparently knew.

"It'll be hard," she thought sadly. Then her face brightened. "But it'll be fun! and if it works I'll be able to be as nice to John as I want to all the rest of my life, and please him to my heart's content. Why, it'll be my duty!"

She smiled and fell into another dream about John, leaning over the fountain, with her copper braids falling across her bosom.

She had forgotten all the outside things, until presently she felt some one standing near her.

"Lean down to the water, Melisande, Melisande!"

the some one sang, in a soft, half-mocking voice.

She turned and looked up.

"How do you do, Mr. Rutherford?" she said sedately.

She had been addressed as "Melisande" too many times, at home with the poets, to be particularly excited, but even a man of Clarence's well-known capabilities couldn't be expected to know this. He disposed himself gracefully along the edge of the fountain. He had a feline and leisurely grace, in spite of the fact that he wasn't specially thin, had Clarence, as he very well knew.

"I hope I won't fall into the water," he observed disarmingly. "I may if you speak to me too severely. See here, Melisande, why did you go and be all engaged to the worthy Dr. Hewitt? You had four or five good years of fun ahead of you if you hadn't."

"I mustn't listen to you, if you talk that way," Joy told him quietly.

"Oh, you'd better," said Clarence with placidity. "I'm very interesting."

"You're very vain," Joy told him, laughing at him in spite of herself.

"I am, indeed—it's one of my charms," explained he. "Now that's out of the way, we'll go on talking."

"Well, *go* on talking!" Joy answered him childishly, putting her hands over her ears. "I can go on not listening!"

Clarence accordingly did, while Joy kept her hands over her ears till her arms were tired and Clarence apparently had no more to say. Then she dropped them.

"I was reciting the Westminster catechism," Clarence observed blandly. "I never waste my gems of conversation on deaf ears. Come, Joy of my life, unbend a little. I don't mean a bit of harm in the world. All I want is a kind word or two and the pleasure of your society."

Joy looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, and then laughed.

"If you were a poet, here is where you would tell me that the fetters of wearying and sordid marriage were not for you—that they wore on your genius," she said unexpectedly.

Clarence gasped. It must have been very much like having the kitten suddenly turn and offer him rational conversation.

"*Et tu,* Laetitia!" he said in a neat and scholarly manner. "Joy, you have cruelly deceived me—I thought you were a simple child of nature."

"I don't know a bit what I am," she answered truthfully, "but the poets at Grandfather's did talk that way—not to me, but to other people—and you sounded like them. You aren't really a poet, are you?"

"Well, I've never been overt about it," he evaded. He did not know what to make of Joy, any more than ever.

Joy, trailing the end of a braid absently in the water, thought a minute longer, then looked up at him.

"It seems to me," she said suddenly, "that you just mock and mock at things all the time. I'm not clever, and I can't answer you cleverly. You might as well make up your mind to it, and then the way I look won't be a disappointment to you. I know I look like a medieval princess. It's because I was brought up to. But I'm not the least bit medieval inside; honestly I'm not. I love to cook and I love children, and I'm always hungry for my meals. I don't want to seem discouraging, but I shall really be a dreadful disappointment to you if you——"

"As long as you have copper-gold hair and sky-blue eyes, *nothing* you can do will disappoint me," said Clarence caressingly. "Be a suffragette, if you will—be a war-widow! It's all the same. I can be just as happy with you—and I intend to be!"

The mockery dropped from his voice for a moment as he said the last words. Joy looked at him, a little frightened for the moment. She smiled, then. . . .

She was only nineteen, but she was thoroughly human, and the spirit of Aunt Lucilla lighted her eyes. She dropped her black lashes against her pink cheeks and spoke irresponsibly.

"But suppose—suppose I should fall in love with you?" she asked in a most little-girl voice. "Don't you see how dreadfully unhappy *I* would be?"

"Oh, you won't," Clarence assured her in a tone whose casualness did not quite hide his welcome of the prospect. "We'll just be interested in each other enough to make it interesting. Why, Joy of My Life, I wouldn't take anything from good old Hewitt for anything in the world."

There was a certain amount of conceit in Clarence's voice and manner, patent even to so inexperienced a person as Joy. He seemed to think that all he had to do was take! Joy looked at him curiously for a moment, and then she sighed. Sometimes she almost wished somebody *would* take her mind off caring so much for John.

"But this isn't real," she suddenly thought, "the sunshine and the gaiety and these kind, handsome Harrington people being good to me, and this Clarence person posing about and trying to toy with my young affections—why, it's like a fairy tale or a play! . . . I just rubbed the wishing ring, and it happened!"

She forgot Clarence again and began to sing softly under her breath, watching the ruffled water.

"What are you thinking, Melisande?" asked Clarence softly.

Joy lifted her wide innocent eyes and gave him a discreet version.

"That, after all, this is a glade in Fairyland, and I am the princess, and you—the dragon," she ended under her breath.

But Clarence, naturally enough, wasn't given to casting himself as a dragon. He was perfectly certain he was a prince, and said so with charming frankness.

Joy continued to sing to herself.

"I don't see why I shouldn't kiss your hand, if I'm a prince," he observed next. "In fact, as nice a little hand as you have really calls for such."

He reached for it—the nearest, with the wishing ring on it.

She snatched it indignantly away and clasped her hand indignantly over the ring. That would be profanation!

"I wish somebody would come!" she thought. "I'll have to leave not only Clarence, but my nice fountain, in a minute." The next thing she thought was, "What a well-trained wishing ring!" for Viola appeared between the tall rose trees at the entrance to the little pleasance.

"Miss Joy, have you seen Philip anywhere?" she asked. "It's his dinner-time, and I've hunted the house upsidedown for him."

"Nowhere at all," said Joy truthfully. "Oh, is it as late as all that? I'd better go, Mr. Rutherford."

She followed Viola swiftly out, waving her hand provokingly to Clarence.

"There's a way out on the other side of the garden," she called back casually.

"I've found a note from Philip, Viola," Phyllis called as they neared the house. "He's lunching out, it seems."

She handed Viola the note.

"I hav gon out too Lunchun," it stated briefly. "Yours Sincerely, Philip Harrington."

"He'll come back," his mother went on, with a perceptible relief in her voice. "He has a corps of old and middle-aged ladies about the village who adore him. He's probably at Miss Addison's—she's his Sunday-school teacher. He really should have come and asked, I suppose. Well, come in, Joy, and let us eat. Allan won't be back—he's gone off to some village-improvement thing that seems to think it would die without him."

They ate in solitary state, except for Angela, and after that nothing happened, except that they separated with one accord to take long, generous naps.

Joy was awakened from hers by Phyllis' voice, raised in surprise.

"But, Miss *Addison!*" she was saying, on the porch

below Joy's window, in a tone that was part amusement, part horror.

Joy slipped on her frock and shoes and ran down to share the excitement. When she got down, Phyllis was just leading the visitor into the old Colonial living-room, and they were having tea brought in. Philip was nowhere to be seen.

"A *wheel*barrow!" Phyllis was saying tragically, as she took her cup from the waitress, who was listening interestedly, if furtively.

"A wheelbarrow," assented Miss Addison, a pretty, white-haired spinster. She, too, took a cup.

Phyllis cast up her eyes in horror and, incidentally, saw Joy.

"Come in," she said resignedly. "I'm just hearing how Philip disported himself at his 'lunchun.'"

"I didn't mean to distress you, but I really thought you should know, Mrs. Harrington," pursued the visitor plaintively.

"I'm eternally grateful," murmured Phyllis, beginning, as usual, to be overcome with the funny side of the situation. "But—oh, Joy, what *do* you think of my sinful offspring? Miss Addison says Philip spent the luncheon hour relating to her how his father went to the saloon in the village, had two glasses of beer, was entirely overcome, and had to be brought home in —in—" by this time Phyllis was laughing uncontrollably—"in a *wheel*barrow!"

Joy, too, was aghast for a moment, then the situation became too much for her, and she also began to laugh.

"Good gracious!" she said.

"And that isn't all!" Phyllis went on hysterically. "After Allan's friends, or the policeman, or whoever it was, tipped him off the wheelbarrow onto the front porch (imagine Allan in a wheelbarrow! It would take two for the length of him!), he staggered in, and would have beaten me, but that my noble son flung himself between! Then he was overcome with remorse—wasn't he, Miss Addison?—and signed the pledge."

"Good gracious!" said Joy, inadequately, again.

"Now, where on earth," demanded Miss Addison, "did he get all that?"

"Only the special angel that watches over bad little boys knows," said his mother with conviction. "And it won't tell. I know by experience that I'll never get it out of Philip. He'll say, sweetly, 'Oh, I just *fought* it, Muvver!' in as infantile a voice as possible."

They all three sat and pondered.

"It sounds just like a tract," said Joy at last.

"Exactly like a tract," assented Phyllis. "Do you suppose—in Sunday-school——"

"I'm his Sunday-school teacher," Miss Addison reminded her indignantly. "That settles *that!*"

"Well, have some more tea, anyway, now the worst

is over," said her hostess hospitably. . . . "A *wheel*-barrow!"

They continued to sit over their teacups and meditate. Suddenly Phyllis rose swiftly and made a spring for the bookcase, scattering sponge-cake as she went.

"I have it, I believe!" she exclaimed. "Well, who'd think—Viola read this to Philip when he was getting over the scarlatina last winter. There wasn't another child's book in the house that he didn't know by heart, and we couldn't borrow on account of the infection. I took it away from them, but the mischief was done. But he's never spoken of it or seemed to remember it from that day to this, and I'd forgotten it, too."

She held up a small, dingy book and opened it to the title-page.

"The Drunkard's Child; or, Little Robert and His Father," it said in lettering of the eighteen-forties.

It was unmistakably the groundwork of Philip's romance. It had a woodcut frontispiece of Little Robert in a roundabout and baggy trousers, inadequately embracing his cowering mother's hoopskirt, while his father, the Drunkard in question, staggered remorsefully back. It was all there, even to the wheelbarrow—also inadequate.

"It didn't hurt Philip's great-grandfather," said his mother. "I don't see why it should have affected

Philip as it did. Different times, different manners, I suppose. . . . The Drunkard's Child!"

"Where *is* he?" Joy thought to ask.

"Innocently playing with his little sister in the nursery," said Phyllis. "Doubtless teaching her that she is a Drunkard's Daughter. I have him still to deal with. . . . A wheelbarrow! I wonder what Allan *will* say?"

CHAPTER NINE

THE TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE

"It wasn't so much my behavior after I was wheeled home," said Philip's father mournfully, "as it was my getting so outrageously drunk on two glasses of beer. That was the final straw. Why couldn't he have made it several quarts of brandy, or even knockout drops?"

"I hope you don't want an innocent child of that age to know about knockout drops!" said Clarence Rutherford, the ubiquitous.

"Well, there's something wrong with his environment," said Allan.

"We are his environment," Phyllis reminded him. "As far as I know we are rather nice people."

The Harringtons, John Hewitt, with Gail and her cousin, not to speak of Joy, were enjoying an unseasonably hot day in the Harrington garden. They had all been playing tennis, and now everybody was sitting or lying about, getting rested. The trees kept the morning sun from being too much of a nuisance, and there was a tray with lemonade, and sweet biscuits which were unquestionably going to ruin everybody's luncheon appetite.

"What that child needs," answered his father, taking another glass of lemonade and the remaining biscuits, "is young life—companions his own age."

They had all been racking their brains to think of a punishment that would fit Philip's crime, or at least some warning that would bring it home to him. He had been led by Viola, subdued and courteous, to tell Miss Addison that he had deceived her. He did, very carefully.

"But it *might* of been my father," he explained as he ended. "Oughtn't we to be glad that it wasn't my father, Miss Addison?"

Miss Addison, quite nonplused by this unexpected moral turn to the conversation, had acknowledged defeat, and fed Philip largely. He had a very good time, apparently, for he grieved to Viola all the way home over Angela's missing such a pleasant afternoon. When he returned he flung himself on Allan.

"Oh, Father, *please* let Angela go, too, next time I go 'pologizing!" he implored. "There were such nice little cakes—just the kind Mother lets her eat!"

Allan shook his head despairingly.

"Please remove him, Viola," he said. "I want to think."

Not only he, but Phyllis and John, had spent a day thinking. No one had, as yet, reached any conclusion at all.

"It's all very well for you to be carefree," he said

now to John, who was laughing like the others. "It isn't up to you to see that the young idea shoots straight."

John's face remained quite cheerful.

"Well, you see, I have Joy's manners and morals to look after," he said, glancing across at her in a friendly way. "That's enough for one man."

Joy curled on the warm grass, laughed lazily. She was too pleasantly tired from tennis to answer. She only curled her feet under her and burrowed into the grass a little more, like a happy kitten.

It didn't seem as if anything ever need interrupt her happiness. And as Phyllis had had the happy thought of ordering luncheon brought out to where they were, there seemed no reason why they should ever move. There was a feeling of unchangingness about the wonderfully holding summer weather, and the general lazy routine, that was as delightful as it was illusive. For the very next day things began to happen.

They were just finishing breakfast when a telegram came.

"I suppose it's from the De Guenthers, telling us which train to meet," Phyllis said carelessly, as she opened it. . . . "Oh!"

"What is it, dear?" asked Allan at her exclamation of distress.

She handed him the telegram.

"Isabel suddenly ill with inflammatory rheumatism. Fear it may affect heart. Can you come on?"

"They're the nearest thing either of us has to relatives," Phyllis explained to Joy. "Inflammatory rheumatism! Oh, Allan, we ought to go."

She looked at him across the table, her blue eyes distressed and wide.

"Of course you shall go, my dearest," Allan told her gently, while Joy wondered what it would be like to have some one speak to her in that tone. The Harringtons were so careless and joyous in their relations with each other, so like a light-hearted, casually intimate brother and sister, that it was only when they were moved, as now, that their real feelings were apparent.

Joy looked off and out the window, and lost herself in a day-dream, her hand, as usual, mechanically feeling for the rough carving of John's ring.

"To be in John's house, close to him, like this, and to have him speak to me so—wouldn't it be wonderful?" she thought, with a warm lift of her heart at even the vision of it. She forgot the people about her for a little, and pictured it to herself.

She had only seen two rooms of the Hewitt house, and that when they were dressed out of all homelikeness, because of the reception. But she could think how they would look, with just John Hewitt and herself going up and down them. They would be happy,

too, in this light-hearted fashion—so happy that they laughed at little things. They would not talk much about loving each other. But they would belong to each other, and they would know it. Each of them would always be there for the other, and know it. They would sit by the wood fire in the dusk. . . .

"Now to set my house in order," said Phyllis, rising from the table. "You said the two train, Allan? All right—I can easily be ready for that, or before, if you like."

She rang for Lily-Anna, who appeared, smiling and comfortable as ever.

"Mr. Harrington and I are going off for some days —perhaps longer, Lily-Anna," Phyllis explained. "I shall have to leave the children with you and Viola. Mrs. De Guenther is very ill."

Lily-Anna seemed used to this sort of thing happening, and said she could manage perfectly well. Indeed, Viola was beamingly amiable over the prospect, when summoned and told. She volunteered to do any mending and packing necessary on the spot.

"How beautifully they take it!" marveled Joy when the servants had gone again, full of shining assurances that all would be well.

"You may well say so!" said Phyllis, lifting her eyebrows. "Their rapture at getting the children to themselves is almost indecent. It's all very well to have such attractive infants, but I sometimes look

sadly back to the days when Lily-Anna loved me for myself alone. And now about you."

"Me?" said Joy in surprise. She had not supposed there was any question about her.

"You," answered Phyllis decisively. "Here is where I am given a chance of escape from making a lifelong enemy of your future mother-in-law. She crossed to the telephone as she spoke, and got Mrs. Hewitt's number. "This is Phyllis Harrington," Joy heard her say. "I called up to say that I am yielding in our struggle for Joy's person. Allan and I have to go away this afternoon. We should love to have her stay here and chaperone Philip and Angela, but it seems a waste. Would you like to have her?"

Sounds of fervent acceptance were evidently pouring over the wire, for Phyllis smiled as she listened.

"She not only wants you," she transmitted to Joy, "but she says that she'll take no chances on our changing our minds, and is coming for you in an hour, whether we go or not. She says to tell you that she's taking you shopping first. . . . You know, we're to have her back when we return," she continued firmly to the telephone. "We saw her first."

She hung up the receiver and swept Joy off upstairs with her while she packed.

"You know, we may never get you again," she warned. "I'm taking a fearful chance in letting you

escape this way. You have to come back, remember, my child."

"Indeed I will come back," Joy promised fervently.

It seemed so strange that all these people should so completely have made her one of themselves, even to the point of wanting to keep her in their homes.

"You are all so good to me!" she said.

"You are exceedingly lovable," explained Phyllis matter-of-factly. "In fact, Clarence remarked the last time I saw him that you had the most unusual kind of charm he had ever seen. He said you were like a sorceress brought up in a nunnery. While I think of it, Joy dear, Clarence and Gail are two of the most confirmed head-hunters I know. They ought to marry each other and keep it in the family, but they won't. I'm not worried about anything Gail can do, but do please keep your fingers crossed when Clarence drops carelessly in. And when he starts discussing your souls turn the conversation to the village water-supply or something as interesting."

Joy smiled a little wistfully.

"John doesn't seem to mind," she said. Then she laughed outright. "Phyllis, I've seen every one of Clarence's tricks all my life. He's the only type I'm accustomed to: it's the John and Allan type I don't know."

"You certainly are a surprise to me," said Phyllis, busily folding a flesh-colored Georgette waist, and

laying it in a tray with tissue-paper in its sleeves. "I don't seem to be able to teach you much, which is a good thing. Now you'd better let me help you pack up enough for a week, for Mrs. Hewitt is due fairly soon."

Joy declined to take any of Phyllis' much-needed time, and went off to fill her suitcase. It was not until she had put in almost everything she intended to take that she thought of the wishing ring again. She looked down at the heavy Oriental carving with what was almost terror. She had wished for something on it, and once more her wish had come true. She was going over to be in the house with John, to see him whenever he was there, to have him—yes, he would have to pretend, at least, that they were lovers, because of his mother. She had as nearly what she had wished for as it was possible for a ring to manage.

"I almost feel as if I had made that poor old lady have the rheumatism," she thought with a thrill of fear. Then she pulled herself up—that was nonsense.

"But anyway," Joy told the ring severely, "I won't touch you when I make wishes after this. I might wish for something in a hurry, and be terribly sorry afterwards."

But one thing she did wish then, deliberately. She sat back on her heels and clasped her fingers over the heavy carving of it. "Please, dear wishing ring, let John be in love with me!" she begged. The next

moment she was scarlet at her own foolishness. The ring couldn't do that, if it had belonged to Aladdin himself.

So she went on packing. She was a little afraid and excited, going off to live in the very house with John, but she couldn't help being a little glad. She would see him for hours and hours every day.

"And oh, dear ring," she whispered, forgetting that she had promised not to wish any more, "don't let him get tired of having me around!"

She was not quite done when she heard the impatient wail of Mrs. Hewitt's horn. She stuffed the last things into the heavy suitcase and ran down, dragging it after her.

Phyllis went out to the car with her, kissing her good-by.

"Now mind, this is only a loan," she told Mrs. Hewitt.

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Mrs. Hewitt with an air of certainty. "Good-by, my dear. Give my love to Mrs. De Guenther. Perhaps when you get back I may give an afternoon tea and allow you to see Joy for a few minutes."

Phyllis laughed, and patted Mrs. Hewitt's gloved hand where it lay on the steering-wheel.

"Use our place all you like, as usual," she said in sole reply, "and don't forget to miss me."

"That's one of the loveliest girls that ever lived,"

said Mrs. Hewitt as they sped away. "Anybody but Phyllis I *would* begrudge you to. Oh, my dear, we're going to have the best time!"

Joy squeezed the hand that should have been, but wasn't, helping the other hand steer. Mrs. Hewitt was so adorably a young girl inside her white-haired stateliness!

"We're going to the next village to buy materials," she told Joy blithely, "and then we're going home to make them up, or I am. It won't hurt to get a bit of the trousseau under way, and you know I haven't sewed a thing for my daughter for thirty-four years —not since the wretched child turned out to be John, and I had to take all the pink ribbons out and put in blue!"

Mrs. Hewitt's inconsequent good spirits, somehow, took away some of the dread with which Joy had been looking forward to her sojourn in John's house. She allowed herself to be motored over to the next town, where there was fairly good shopping, and went obediently into the stores. It was not until she saw the lady ordering down for inspection bolts of crêpe de Chine and wash satin and glove silk in whites and pinks and flesh-colors, that the full inwardness of the thing dawned on her. For evidently Mrs. Hewitt had every intention of paying for all this opulence, and Joy didn't quite see what to do about it. Nor did the pocket-money her grandfather had given her when she

left him warrant her paying for the things herself, even if she used it all.

"Please don't get these things," she whispered when she found a chance. "I—I think I oughtn't to."

"Oughtn't to, indeed," replied Mrs. Hewitt coolly. "'Nobody asked you, sir, she said!' I'm getting them myself. I may be intending to make up a set of wash-satin blankets for the Harrington bulldog for all you know. I don't think he'd be surprised—they treat him like a long-lost relative now. Now be sensible, darling. Do you think valenciennes or filet would be better to trim the blankets? Or do you like these lace and organdy motifs? They'd look charming on a black bulldog."

Joy laughed in spite of herself.

"There's no doing anything with you," she said.

"Not a thing!" said the triumphant spoiled child whom the world took for an elderly lady. "Now we'll get down to business. Would you rather have crêpe or satin for camisoles? Half of each would be a good plan, I think, if you have no choice."

There *wasn't* any doing anything with Mrs. Hewitt. She was having a gorgeous time, and she carried Joy along with her till the girl was choosing pink and white silks and satins, and patterns to make them by, with as much enthusiasm as if no day of reckoning loomed up, three and a half weeks away.

There was no way out. Of course she would leave

the things behind. The thought gave her a pang already, for Joy had been dressed by her grandfather's ideas only as far as frocks went. Her grandmother had seen to everything else, and was devoted to a durable material known as longcloth, which one buys by the bolt and uses forever.

But they sped merrily home, after a festive luncheon, with about forty dollars' worth of silk and lace and ribbon aboard, not to speak of patterns, and a blue muslin frock which was a bargain and would just fit Joy, and which she had invested in herself.

" Oh what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive!"

Joy thought of that quotation so often now that she was beginning to feel it was her favorite verse. But she touched the big parcel with a small, appreciative foot, and remembered that the blue frock, at least, would be saved out of the wreck, and that John liked blue.

Mrs. Hewitt showed her her bedroom when they got back, and left her to take a nap. But she did not want to rest. She lay obediently against the pillows and stared out the window at a great, vivid maple tree, and felt very much like staying awake for the rest of her natural life.

" How on earth was I to know that mothers-in-law

were like this?" she demanded of herself indignantly. "All the ones I ever heard about made your life a misery."

It is rather calming to remember that you really couldn't have foreseen what is happening to you. So Joy presently rose happily, smoothed her hair and tidied herself generally, and came sedately down the stairs, prepared to go on playing her part. Only it was getting to feel more like a reality than a pretense. The other life, the one she would go back to, seemed the dream now.

"John will be here soon," Mrs. Hewitt greeted her. "It will be a surprise to him: you know, he hasn't an idea you are here. I wouldn't tell him what Phyllis said."

Joy dimpled.

"Do you suppose he'll mind?" she ventured.

"Oh, I think he'll bear up," said Mrs. Hewitt amiably. "Come here, Joy; I've cut out a half-dozen of the silk ones already. Do you know how to do them? They're just a straight piece—see——"

Joy knelt down by her, absorbed in the pretty thing and in seeing how to make it. The day was chillier than any had yet been, and a fire had been built in the deep fireplace of the living-room. Mrs. Hewitt was sitting near it, with the pretty scraps of silk and lace all over her lap, and an ever-widening circle of cut-out garments around her.

"We can do the most of these by hand," she mused. "Indeed, we shouldn't do them any other way."

Joy rooted sewing things out of a basket near by and sat down just where she was, between Mrs. Hewitt and the large, fatherly Maltese cat who occupied a wonted cushion on the other side of the fireplace. And so John found her when he came in. The lamp had just been lighted, and its soft rays shone on Joy's bronze head and down-bent, intent little face. She had on a little white apron that Mrs. Hewitt had fastened around her waist, and she was sewing hard.

Before Joy heard John come in she felt him. No matter how tired he was, there was always about John an atmosphere of well-being and sunniness, of "all's right with the world," that made faces turn to him instinctively when he stood in a doorway. But Joy did not raise her eyes to look at him, nor did she move.

His mother rose and came over to greet him. Joy did not hear her whisper: "The child feels a little shy. She'll be more at ease now you've come."

John came swiftly over to where she sat on the floor, very still, with her hands flying, and her eyes on her work.

"Why, Joy dear, this is a lovely thing that I didn't expect," he said gently. "Welcome—home!"

He smiled down at her and held out his hands to help her up. Quite unsuspectingly, she pushed her work into the pocket along the hem of her sewing-

apron and laid her hands in his, and he drew her easily to her feet. But, instead of releasing her then, he drew her closer—and kissed her, quite as calmly as he had his mother a moment before. . . . No, not quite as calmly. Joy felt his arms close around her, as if he was glad to have her in his hold.

"Let me go," she said in too low a voice for Mrs. Hewitt to hear.

"Who has drawn the wine must drink it," he told her in the same low voice. He went on, still softly, but more seriously, "My child, this sort of thing is necessary, if you want Mother to be satisfied while you are here. It's—a courtesy to your hostess. I promise to do no more of it than is necessary, as it seems to trouble you so. But—don't you see?"

He released her, and she stepped away.

"I—see," she answered him a little uncertainly. "Th-thank you. . . . I—I couldn't help coming, John."

Then she fled upstairs to dress for dinner.

She puzzled all the time she was dressing. There was no use talking—his mother *needn't* be amused by such things. She would get on perfectly well without seeing them. John might think he was doing it as a sacred duty—in spite of her adoration of him it did not impress Joy that way. . . . There were men who kissed you just because you were a girl, if you let them; Clarence was that kind, according to all ac-

counts. But—John! He was the best, kindest, noblest man she had ever known. Every one seemed to have the same feelings about him that she had. Even when Clarence had sneered at him he had only been able to call him a "reliable citizen." . . . And yet—he seemed to want to kiss her! He liked it.

"Of course," said Joy to herself, with a beating heart beneath the wisdom of Aunt Lucilla, "the answer is that he probably doesn't know it. Men don't ever seem to know things about themselves. But I must remember that it's no sign he likes *me*."

But it was quite true that it was going to have to continue. It had dawned on Joy that her will was no match for that of the Hewitt family. But it was a very kindly will. She smiled a little, irrepressibly, as she clasped her girdle—she was wearing one of the old picture dresses—and went downstairs. For even if you are a little impostor who has captured a five-weeks' lover by means of a wishing ring, unlimited things to wear are nice, and having the man you are in love with want to pet you is nice, too!

At the top of the stairs a thought struck her. Joy's thoughts had a way of arriving suddenly. She had set out to be happy. Very well!

"I don't see why I shouldn't be engaged to the limit!" she thought daringly. "I—don't—see—why I shouldn't! . . . for just this little while—just this one little while out of my life before I go back to the

shadows! . . . I don't care if I am bad! I don't care if I am unmaidenly! I'll be as happy as ever I can. They'll think I'm very dreadful, anyway, all of them, when they know all about me!"

She swept on down the stairs, head up, cheeks flaming.

And so, when she came upon John, waiting her courteously at the stair-foot, she did just exactly what in her heart she desired to do. She stood on the step above him and deliberately laid both little white hands on his shoulders and smiled into his eyes.

"I am so glad I'm here with you," she said, looking at him with no attempt to hide the love she felt for him. "Are you glad to have your sweetheart in the house—for a little while? Say so—please, dear!"

He laughed light-heartedly, and his eyes shone.

"A little while?" he answered gaily. "I can stand a lot more of you than that, kiddie. . . . Come, now, Mother's waiting. Or shall I lift you down from the step? . . . I always seem to want to lift you about, somehow, you're so little and light—such a little princess!"

He set his hands about her waist, but she slipped from him, laughing excitedly.

"I believe you think I'm just a doll somebody gave you to play with!" she told him with a certain sweet mockery that was hers sometimes. . . . "Come, now, Mother's waiting!"

She ran down the hall, evading his grasp, and laughing back at him over her shoulder, to Mrs. Hewitt and safety.

"Come, children, dinner will be cold," said Mrs. Hewitt obliviously.

"Coming, Mother dear!" answered Joy.

CHAPTER TEN

CLARENCE SWOOPS DOWN

It was quite as pleasant to breakfast with John as it had been to dine with him, which had been something Joy had secretly wondered about. When breakfast was over, he told her matter-of-coursely that he was going to take her with him on his morning rounds.

"You'd better take a book," he advised her practically. "If you don't, you'll be bored, because I'll be leaving you outside a good deal while I'm inside seeing patients."

"I'll take my sewing," she told him, trying to be as matter-of-fact as he was. "That is, if you don't mind."

She was smiling as happily as a child over being allowed to go, and he smiled down at her, pleased, too.

"Not unless it's too big," he told her with an attempt at firmness which failed utterly.

She went off, singing under her breath, as usual, to get a very small sewing-bag, with a little piece of to-be-hemstitched pink silk in it, and John looked over at his mother.

"She certainly has the prettiest ways!" he said involuntarily.

"You're a good lover, Johnny," his mother rejoined appreciatively.

"Nonsense!" said John before he thought, and then pulled himself up. "That is—I don't think a man would have to be in love with her to see that," he ended lamely. "I thought they were attractive before I——"

"Exactly," retorted his mother with distinct skepticism. "That's why you—" She paused in mimicry of his breaking off, and, then, as Joy came back, gave him an affectionate little push toward the door. She followed them out to the gate and leaned over it, watching them. "Good-by, children!" she called after them. "Don't be late for luncheon!"

"Don't stand out there in the wind with no wraps, Mother," advised John.

"Nonsense!" she replied with spirit. "You have Isabel De Guenther's rheumatism on your mind, that's what's the matter with *you*. The idea of a woman of her intelligence giving up to inflammatory rheumatism is simply ridiculous. You don't get things unless you give up to them."

It was a beautiful doctrine, and doubtless had much to do with making Mrs. Hewitt the healthy and dauntless person she was, but it had its limitations, and John reminded her of them inexorably.

"You have neuritis when you catch cold in the wind, and you know it," he told her. "Do go in, Mother, to please me."

"You know I'll be back again as soon as you're out of sight," she observed. But she did go in.

Alas for the power of elderly ladies to keep off neuritis by defiance! When they came back at twelve-thirty Mrs. Hewitt was nowhere to be seen.

"Mrs. Hewitt says she has a slight headache, and will you please not wait luncheon for her: she's having it upstairs," was the message they received.

"Very well," said John gravely, and he and Joy proceeded to have luncheon alone together.

He glanced smilingly across the table at Joy as she poured his tea with steady little hands.

"It looks very much as if you were going to have to take charge, more or less," he said. "That's our friend the neuritis. Mother never admits it's anything but a headache the first day. Do you think you can look after things?"

"Why not, if she wants me to?" asked Joy.

"Well, I can imagine you standing on a drawbridge or a portcullis, or whatever it was they trimmed medieval castles with, and waving your hands to the knights going by," began John teasingly; "but it's a stretch of imagination to fancy a medieval princess pouring my tea and seeing that my papers are in order . . ."

"You *know* I can't help having red hair," protested

Joy, coming straight to the point. "And if your grandfather had always dressed you in costumes, you couldn't get to be modern all at once, either. I think I'm doing very well."

John threw back his fair head and laughed.

The idea of his grandfather, who had been a wholesale hardware merchant, with a New England temperament to match, "dressing him in costumes," was an amusing one, and he said as much.

Joy laughed, too.

"Well, there, you see!" she said triumphantly. "There's a great deal in not having handicaps. Why, there was a poet used to write things as if he were me, all about that, and I couldn't stop him. One began:

"I was a princess in an ivory tower:
Why did you sit below and sing to me?"

"Well," said John, as she paused indignantly, "I'll be the goat. Why *did* he sit below and sing to you?"

"Because he wanted the pull Grandfather could give him, as far as I could make out," replied Joy with vigor. "And I don't call it a bit nice way to act!"

She did not quite know why John laughed this time. But she was very glad that he was not bored at being with her.

"Oh, Joy, Joy!" he said. "I take it back. You are not medieval—entirely. Or, if you are, princesses

in ivory towers are more delightful figures than I've always thought them."

"We aim to please," said Joy demurely. "But I have to explain that a lot, it seems to me. I had it out with Clarence Rutherford only a day or so ago."

"Oh, you did?" considered John. "Well—don't try to please too hard. Remember that you are supposed to please me; but you don't have to extend your efforts beyond my family circle."

He was only half in earnest, but he *was* in earnest at least half. She wondered just what he meant for a moment, then it occurred to her that he meant Clarence, no less. She was on the verge of saying comfortingly:

"Clarence is just trying to make me fall in love with him. He doesn't count a bit."

But she stopped herself, remembering that Aunt Lucilla would never have said such an unwise thing, let alone Gail.

"I must go now and see how your mother is, as soon as we are through," she told him instead.

She found Mrs. Hewitt surrounded by more hot-water bottles than she had ever thought existed, and reduced to the point where she was nearly willing to confess to neuritis.

"I have pains all over me, child," she announced, "and as long as you are here I shall continue to de-

scribe them, so you'd better run. And if you tell John it's neuritis I shall probably take you over to Phyllis' fountain and drown you the first day I'm up. It will be an annoyingly chilly death if the weather keeps on as it is now——"

She stopped in order to give a little wriggle and a little moan, and saw John standing in the doorway.

"How's the neuritis, Mother?" he inquired sympathetically.

"You know perfectly well," said his mother without surprise, "that I can't spare one of these hot-water bottles to throw at you, John, and I think you're taking a despicable advantage."

"I'll get you some more hot water," said he placidly, collecting two red bags and a gray one, and crossing to her stationary washstand.

"There's a lower stratum you might get, Joy," suggested Mrs. Hewitt, and Joy reached down at the hint and secured the two remaining bottles, which she filled when John was through.

"That's *much* better," Mrs. Hewitt thanked them, with what was very like a purr.

"Incidentally," said John with concern in his voice, "it's about all anybody can do for you till the weather changes; that and being careful of your diet."

"Yes, and I got it this morning standing out in the damp and chill, watching you out of sight. Watching people out of sight is unlucky, anyway," said his

mother. "I might as well say it, if you won't. And I don't expect to be able to get up tomorrow, which is Thursday."

"Thursday?" asked John, sitting down on the couch at the foot of the bed. "Is Thursday some special feast?"

"Thursday's the cook's day out, usually," explained Joy practically. "But she doesn't need to worry. Dear, if you'll tell me what to do——"

"Usually Nora attends to things that day," explained Mrs. Hewitt sadly, but with a trace of hope in her voice, "but tomorrow she has a funeral she must attend. Quite a close funeral, she explained to me; the remains was a dear friend!"

Joy smiled down on Mrs. Hewitt like a Rossetti angel.

"You don't need to worry a bit," she consoled. "How many meals will she be gone?"

"Only one," Mrs. Hewitt told her, with what was obviously a lightened heart. "Dinner."

"Just dinner for us three? Why, I can manage that easily," said Joy confidently. "At least—I hope I'll suit. I really can cook."

"You blessed angel! Of course you'll suit!" said Mrs. Hewitt. "I'm so glad. John *does* like good meals."

She moaned a little, rather as if it was a luxury, and turned cautiously over.

"You don't have to stay with me any longer, children," she said. "The last responsibility is off my conscience. And I may state, in passing, John, that I never imagined you had sense enough to pick out anybody as satisfactory as Joy."

They both laughed a little, and then John said, abruptly, that he had to go soon, and swept Joy off with him. Outside the door he stopped short.

"See here, Joy, you mustn't do things like that," he said abruptly. "You're a guest, not a maid."

She set her back against the closed door they had just emerged from and looked up at him.

"Please let me go on playing," she begged him with a little break in her voice. "You know I never had any mother to speak of, any more than she had any daughter, and—and—please!"

He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face to look at it keenly.

"Do you really like her so, child?" he said.

Joy hoped he would not feel her cheek burn under his touch.

"Yes," she answered simply. "And—and now I must go and plan a dazzling menu, please, and look in the icebox without hurting the cook's feelings. It's a case of, 'Look down into the icebox, Melisande!' as Clarence Rutherford would put it."

But she did not say the last sentence aloud. She only laughed as the phrase presented itself to her.

"Now, what are you laughing at?" demanded John.

"If I told you," said Joy like an impertinent child, "you'd know. And now, dear sir, you have to go out on your rounds. Be sure to be back in time for dinner—my dinner. I'm going to plan it tonight, even if I don't cook it."

He didn't seem angry at her—only amused.

"You plan a dinner—fairy princess!" he teased her, looking down at her picturesque little figure from his capable, broad-shouldered height.

"See if I can't!" said Joy defiantly.

And he saw.

When he got back that evening, cold and tired and a little unhappy over a child in his care who did not seem to be gaining, Joy met him at the door, drawing him into the warmth and light with two little warm hands. She had dressed herself in the little blue muslin frock she had bought herself the morning before. It had a white fichu crossing and tying behind, which gave her the look, somehow, of belonging in the house. Her hair was parted demurely and pinned into a great coil at the back of her head, held by a comb that he recognized as his mother's. What he did not recognize or remember was that he had told her once that his dream-girl "had her hair parted—and wore blue—and was connected somehow with an open fire." But he knew that she looked very sweet and lovely and very much as if she belonged where she was.

"Oh, come in, dear!" she cried. "You're tired. Come to the fire a minute before you go upstairs."

She spoke almost as if she were his wife, and he looked less tired as he came to her.

"I like being welcomed home this way," he told her, putting his arm around her, instead of releasing her, and going with her into the living-room. "Why, Joy, I take it all back about your not being able to keep house. One look at you would make anybody sure of it. . . . Are you doing it all for Mother, dear?" he broke off unexpectedly to ask her. "Aren't you doing it a little bit for me"

She looked up at him, flushing.

"Yes—a little bit—" she said breathlessly. Then she made herself speak more lightly. "I did make the dressing and the pudding sauce myself," she admitted as gaily as she could for a fast-beating heart. "But I hoped there weren't traces. Is there flour on my face?"

She smiled flashingly at him and tipped her face up provokingly, slipping from his hold where they stood by the fire together. He made one step close to her again.

"You know perfectly well what to expect for a question like that," he said with an unaccustomed excitement in his voice, and kissed her.

Usually when he did that Joy made some struggle to escape. But tonight, in the firelight, a little tired

and very glad to see him, she kissed him back, as if she were veritably his.

He dropped on one knee beside the blaze, drawing her down on the hearth-rug by him.

"I feel like the man in the fairy-stories," he said in a voice Joy did not quite know, "who catches an elf-girl in some unfair way, and finds her turn to a dear human woman in his house. Joy . . . will she stay human?"

Joy's heart beat furiously as she knelt there, held close to his side. The little head with its great coil of glittering hair drooped.

"She—she always was human," she half whispered, her throat tightening with excitement. She could feel the blood stealing up over her face.

"That is no answer, Joy, my dear," he said softly.

But it was at this moment that a voice behind the curtains said, "Dinner is served."

Joy sprang up, but John stayed where he was, his broad shoulders and fair head bent a little forward as he looked into the blaze.

She touched his arm timidly.

"John—please—you must go up and see your mother before dinner."

He roused himself from whatever he had been thinking of and turned to her.

"I must, certainly," he replied, springing up. "I think I am answered. . . . Am I not, dear?"

"Why, yes," said Joy with a little surprise, but as gently and confidently as ever. "I answered you. I always do what you tell me, don't I?"

He touched her hair lightly and smiled for an answer as he passed her on his way up. She heard him whistling light-heartedly above, as she, too, stood staring into the fire.

She hadn't thought that any one could be so very kind and lovely as John was being to her tonight. She could feel yet the pressure of his arm as he held her beside him. And it was going to last a great deal longer—weeks longer! She could be as happy and as much with him and as much to him as she wanted to. There would be Clarence's mocking love-making, too, for flattery and amusement. And when she had to go back home, at last, she would have so much happiness, so much good times, so much love to remember, that it would keep her warm and happy for years and years!

When John returned, his hair damp and nearly straight with brushing, and his eyes still bright with laughter, she was sitting at the head of the table, waiting for him happily.

"It's a nice world, isn't it?" she suggested like a child. "And do you like whipped cream in your tomato bisque?"

"It is, and I do, very much. Am I to have it?"

Joy nodded proudly, her eyes shining.

"I don't know about the world, but you are going to have the whipped cream," she said, as she felt for the electric push-button in the floor with one small, circling foot.

"I might as well tell you now," said John gaily, "that the bell you are trying to step on is disconnected. Mother unhooked it eight months ago, because when she was excited she always forgot and stamped on it. I think we use a glass and a knife."

"Oh!" said Joy. "Well, I haven't the technique—would you?"

But Nora came in with the soup just then without having been rung for, having evidently been hovering sympathetically near.

"Pardon me, Doctor, but the bell *is* connected up," she breathed. "I hooked it up myself as soon as Mrs. Hewitt gave Miss Havenith the housekeeping."

It had evidently been a sore point with Nora—and, if the truth were told, with John, who had an orderly mind. Although he adored his flyaway, irresponsible mother, it was in spite of her ways and not because of them.

"Do you think you are apt to get excited and step on the bell?" he asked Joy.

She shook her head.

"I like things the way they're planned," she confessed. "They go along more easily."

"I suppose," he meditated aloud, "you might even put a man's collars in the same place twice running."

"Where else?" demanded Joy, who was so thoughtful of such things that she was even intrusted with certain duties of the sort for Grandfather.

"Well, Mother hasn't repeated herself for twenty-eight years," said John a little wistfully. "She says she doesn't intend to get in a rut, nor let me."

Joy laughed aloud.

"It must take lots of spare time, hunting new spots!" she said. "I'm afraid I'd think life was too short to take all that trouble."

"I'm coming to the conclusion that there's nothing you can't do," he said irrelevantly. "But I suppose you had a very able godmother—princesses do, don't they?"

"I have a wishing ring," Joy explained, entering into the play. "It's very well trained. All I have to do is to tell it things, and it sees to them immediately."

John went on eating his soup.

"You look as if you wanted to ask it to do something," she pursued.

He looked thoughtful.

"As a matter of fact, I do; but it seems an unfair advantage to take not only of a docile wishing ring, but of you," he stated.

"Try us and see," invited Joy, ringing, with a visible satisfaction in things, for the next course.

So John took courage.

"It's socks," he confessed with a boyish shamefacedness. "I—I'd like to see how you'd look doing them. I can't quite make myself see you, even now. . . . I suppose I'm silly—I'd like to see you sitting under the light in there, sewing for me, just once."

"You mean mending, not sewing," Joy told him cheerfully. However the wishing ring may have felt about the request, the princess was frankly delighted. "Have you got many? I do them very fast!"

John still looked doubtful. He still seemed to feel that it was a mean advantage to take of the most domesticated ring and princess.

"You see," he explained, "Mother's idea is—and it's likely a very good one—that when socks have holes you throw 'em away and get more. She doesn't make allowance, though, for one's getting attached to a pair. And I bought six pairs lately that I liked awfully well, and I hated to see them die. . . . They're just little holes."

"I'll get them and do them as soon as we're through dinner," she promised. "Won't your mother mind?"

"She'll be delighted," John promised sincerely. "But she hasn't them. I have."

Accordingly, after dinner Joy demanded them, and John produced them, while she got out her mending-basket, something he had never suspected her of possessing, he told her.

She sat down under the lamp with her work, tying on the little sewing-apron Mrs. Hewitt had given her the day before.

"Why, they scarcely have holes at all," she marveled. "I can do lots more than these."

"There are lots more," said John rather mournfully. But he did not feel particularly mournful. He was absorbed in the picture she made sitting there by the lamp, near the fire, her red mouth smiling to itself a little, and her black lashes shadowing her cheeks as her hands moved deftly at her work. John himself, on the other side of the fire, had a paper across his knees, but he forgot to read it, watching her. She seemed to turn the place into a home, sitting there quietly happy, swiftly setting her tiny, accurately woven stitches.

John's mother was an adorable playmate, but responsibilities were, to her, something to laugh about. She had always declared that John should have been her father, not her son; and he had always tried to fill the rôle as best he could. But there had always been things, though he had never admitted it to himself, that he had missed. It would have been pleasant to him if there had been some one who shared his interest in the looks of the place and in the gardens and orchards that were his special pride. He would have liked to have his mother care about his patients, to play for him in the evenings, perhaps, and to think about his tastes in little things. But though a tall harp stood

in a corner of the living-room, and a piano was somewhere else, they were not often touched. Mrs. Hewitt was passionately interested in people. She loved traveling and house-parties and fads of all kinds—but she had no roots to speak of. John had never felt so much as if his house was his home as he did tonight, with the cold rain dashing against the windows outside, and inside the warm light, and the busy girl sitting across from him, sewing, and smiling to herself.

She looked up, as he glanced across at her contentedly, and spoke.

"I thought you seemed a little down tonight when you came in, John. How is the little La Guardia girl? You were having something of a struggle over her treatment the last time I went with you."

"By Jove, you have a memory!" said John, seeming a little startled. "The child is worse today, and it *was* on my mind. How on earth did you guess it, Joy?"

She only laughed softly.

"Don't you suppose I'm interested in your affairs? I don't like you to be worried. And I knew Giulia La Guardia was the only patient who wasn't doing well at last accounts. Just what is the trouble?"

John leaned forward and began to tell her about the child. Her blue eyes glanced up and down, back and forth, from him to her sewing, as she listened, and occasionally asked a question. They had both forgot-

ten everything but the room and themselves, when they heard a genial male voice in the hall.

"No, indeed, my dear girl," it said, "I don't need to be announced in the very least. I'll go straight in."

And in just as brief a time as it might take an active young man to shed his overshoes and his raincoat, in walked Clarence Rutherford, as gay as always, and unusually secure of his welcome.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PIRATE COUSINS TO THE RESCUE

"THOUGHT I'd drop in and tell you some inspiriting news, it's such a beastly night," said he with *empressement*. "—Princess Melisande! What have they been doing to you?" he broke off to ask tenderly under his breath. "Our little princess turned into a Cinderella!"

His tone was calculated to induce self-pity in the breast of an oyster. But Joy, though she liked it mildly, did not feel moved to tears. Clarence was an interruption, even if a flattering one.

"My mother is ill," explained John, when Clarence had greeted him also in his most setting-at-ease manner. ("Kind of a man who'd try to make you welcome in your own house!" he growled under his breath. John also felt interrupted.)

But Clarence established himself friendlily in a third chair, and told Joy with charming masterfulness that she was to put down her work immediately and li[sten] to him.

"We're going to get up a Gilbert and [Sullivan] opera," said he. "Now it stands to re[ason]

have to have you. I can tell by the pretty way you speak you have a good stage delivery, and you have all sorts of presence. Question is, have you a voice? If so, much honor shall be yours."

"Well, I've had lessons for years, and they say so," offered Joy modestly. "It's mezzo-soprano—lyric."

Both men looked at her in surprise. People were always being surprised at things she knew—as if she had ever done anything in her life but be trained—for no particular purpose, as it had seemed. And now everything she knew seemed to be going to be useful, one way or another. Harp lessons, singing lessons, lessons in the proper way to speak Grandfather's poetry—there had never seemed to be any particular point to any of them. And now everything was falling into line.

"Go on," said Clarence. "But I forgot, you said you couldn't dance."

"Only the kind that people do in bare feet and Greek draperies, and I hate that," Joy answered deprecatingly.

"You *are* a Philistine," said Clarence. "But it's attractive."

"One of Grandfather's friends does it for a living, and taught me, as a token of affection and esteem, she called it. Would it be any use?"

"Use?" said Clarence rapturously. "You are

exactly what the doctor ordered. If I can stun Gail into submission you shall be our leading lady, with all the real star parts in your grasp. Rehearsals at ten sharp, and *I'm* the director. *Me voici!*"

He rose and made her a deep bow.

He had, apparently, quite forgotten John, who still sat quietly with his paper across his knees, listening to them.

"And where do I come in?" he asked with a little twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh—oh yes," returned Clarence genially, "my dear fellow, how could we have forgotten you? Good old John, to want a part!"

(He sounded to Joy rather too much as if he was saying, "Good old Fido!"

"It's something like saying it to a large dog with a bite, too," she meditated naughtily. "Clarence may find that out in a minute.")

She went on with her domestic duties, mending the tiny holes in the socks in her lap, and smiling secretly to herself. It did not occur to her, but if any one had told her a month before that she would be sitting alone with two interesting men, watching their relations becoming more and more strained on her account, she would have denied it flatly. Now that it was happening it seemed quite natural. It had doubtless seemed quite natural to Aunt Lucilla. . . . S[illegible] on

placidly, while Clarence continued his infuriating efforts to put John at ease.

"There'll be a delightful part for you, old man," he assured his friend tenderly. "Don't worry about that. You'll have your chance."

The idea of a dominant, large-ideaed, hardworking John Hewitt hungering for "his chance" in an amateur comic opera struck Joy as so funny that she couldn't repress a small giggle and a glance across at him. John caught her look and gave her an answering gleam of amusement.

"You have the kindest heart in the world, Rutherford," said he sedately, "and I'll never forget it of you. . . . Joy, my dear, would you mind running upstairs and seeing if Mother needs anything? And you may put away those socks you've been doing in my top drawer at the same time."

Joy stiffened a little at the tone of easy authority, and then caught John's eye again. The amused look was still there—that, and a look of certainty that she would help him play his hand. He was getting neatly back at Clarence!

She rose meekly.

"Yes, John," she said in the very tone she would have used if the alternative had been a beating, and excusing herself to Clarence in the same meek voice, took herself and her completed work upstairs.

A glance at her room through the crack of the door

told Joy that Mrs. Hewitt was sleeping sweetly. She opened the door of John's room with a more fearful heart. It seemed a little frightening to go into his own private room where he lived. She pushed open the door and tiptoed in.

It was a large room, very orderly, with a faint, fresh smell of cigars and toilet water about it—the smell that no amount of airing can ever quite drive out of a man's room. Joy liked it. The dresser, flanked by a tie-rack, faced her as she came in. She ran to it, jerked out a drawer and stuffed in the socks hurriedly, and turned to go down again. In the middle of the room she paused for a moment. It was all so intimately, dearly John, and she did love John so! . . . And what was she, after all, with all her independences and certainties, but an ignorant, unwise child whom two wise grown men were using for a pet or a plaything—how could she tell which?

She felt suddenly little and frightened and helpless. The current of mischief and merriment dropped away from her for a minute, here where everything, from the class picture on the wall to the pipe on the bureau, spoke so of John—of what everything about him meant to her—about what going away from him would mean. She flung herself on her knees beside the narrow iron cot in the corner, her arms out over the pillow where his head rested.

"Oh, God, please make it all come straight and

right!" she begged. "I don't suppose I did what I ought to, and maybe I'm not now, but please do let things come out the way they should! And if you can't make us both happy, make John—but—oh, God, please try to tuck me in too—I do want to be happy so!"

She knelt there a little longer, with her arms thrown out over the pillow. Saying her prayers always comforted her. She waited till she was quieter. Then she rose resolutely and dried her eyes, and went downstairs again, to make her report.

She found that Clarence was gone.

"I got rid of him," John explained serenely to her questioning glance. "You didn't need him particularly, did you, kiddie?"

Joy lifted her eyebrows.

"Not particularly," she replied, "but I should have liked to say good-night to him."

"I felt exactly that way myself," responded John cheerfully, "so I did. I was like the man in the Ibsen parody, who said, 'I will not only make him *feel,* but *be* at home!'" He paused a moment, and looked graver. "Come here, kiddie," he said.

Joy had been standing just inside the door all this time, on tiptoe for flight. She came slowly over in response to his beckoning hand, and he drew her down to a stool beside him, keeping his arm around her.

"Little girl," he said, "you're young, and you're in-

experienced, and I don't want to see you let Rutherford go too far. I'd rather you didn't take part in this affair he's getting up."

Joy started back from his encircling arm, and looked at him reproachfully.

"Oh, John! Why, I want to *dreadfully!*"

"It isn't that I want to take any pleasure away from you," he explained. "It's simply that the opera would of necessity throw you into closer contact with Clarence—and I don't think you quite understand what Clarence is. He is very attractive, but, as I have told you before, he is not a man I would trust. A man who goes as deliberately about making women in love with him as he does, with a frank admission to other men that he collects them, isn't a man I want you to have much to do with."

Joy moved away from the arm entirely. She felt hurt.

"In other words, you're afraid he'll toy with my young affections?" she answered flippantly. "Very well—let him try! Goodness knows he's labeled loudly enough. Every time he comes within a mile somebody says that about him. Everything about him says it for itself, for the matter of that. It isn't any secret. Let him toy! It amuses him and doesn't hurt me."

"If I could be sure it wouldn't hurt you—" said John in a low voice. "He is very fascinating, Joy."

There was a note of pain in John's voice, but Joy did not heed it.

"*You* are hurting me!" she said angrily, rising. "How can you——"

She did not finish. She had been going to say, "How can you talk that way when I belong to you?" but she had not the courage. He could never know how much she belonged to him. "I very much want to be in this opera, and I think I shall," she said definitely.

"I have no way of preventing you," he answered coldly.

"But can't you trust me not to be silly?" she asked in a softer tone. "Oh, John, I'll promise not to let Clarence break my heart. I promise not to let *anything* break it. Good-night."

She gathered up her mending-basket, set her chair carefully where it had belonged, and went slowly out of the room without another word.

She did not know how John would greet her next morning. But he proved to be no more of a malice-bearing animal than she, and when she smiled brightly at him over the coffee-cups he smiled back in quite as friendly a fashion, and they had a very cheerful breakfast together—so cheerful that John was late getting out on his rounds. At the door he paused, looking back at her.

"Look here, kiddie, I wasn't fair about that thing last night," he said. "I've been thinking it over. I

haven't a right in the world to ask you to keep out of something that would give you pleasure. Go on and play all the parts there are in it if you like. I'll be in it myself, in the 'nice part' Rutherford is so considerately saving up for me—" he grinned—"and——"

"And if you see me being swept off my feet you can wave your handkerchief, or something," ended Joy for him, and they both laughed. And so peace was restored, and Joy went on about her morning duties with a happy heart. It seemed to her, as she thought of him while she worked, that he had been unwontedly tender of her as he bade her good-by. She could not think why. At any rate she was very happy, and she sang as she sat at the living-room desk, after her morning inspection of the ice-box, writing out the list for the marketing, and the menus for that day's luncheon and dinner.

The maids took a deep interest in her, and if instant obedience and willing service meant anything, approved of her. This was the day when she was going to have to get the dinner all herself, and she was looking forward to it with pleasure. She had never been left to herself to do anything at home, because Grandmother and old Elizabeth had seen her toddle into the kitchen and "want to help" when she was four, and they therefore honestly thought she was four still where judgment was concerned.

As she sat and hummed to herself and wrote, the telephone rang. She sprang to it with that unquestioned obedience which telephone-bells cow us into, and listened. The Harrington children had called her up a couple of times, and she thought it might be Philip. Or maybe Clarence. But instead, she heard Gail's slow, assured voice.

"Clarence has been telling me the sad story of your life," she drawled, "and implores me to rescue you. I'm coming over to do it in a moment or so—as soon as I can detach Harold Gray from my side. . . . I've told him he also must devote himself to your service, so expect him along some time today."

She hung up without waiting for an answer, before Joy could do anything. She sat back in her chair, staring out the window in dismay. She had no idea what Clarence might have said about anything, but she devoutly wished he hadn't said it. She did not want Gail in her house. She caught herself up. That was the way she was coming to think of it—her house!

"Well, it isn't," she reminded herself. "After all, I'm a pilgrim and a stranger, and Gail is an old friend."

She returned to her list and her planning, though the fun was all out of it; and when Gail arrived a half-hour later, a bunch of chrysanthemums in her belt and a small grip in her hand, she greeted her with admirable calm.

She wished for a moment that Clarence had seen fit to come himself. He might say too familiar things, but at least there was an undertone of admiration about him very comforting in Gail's half-scornful presence. Also he sat on Gail occasionally in a calm and brotherly manner which cheered.

"Poor little Cinderella!" Gail greeted her. "I hear that Mrs. Hewitt has dropped all the housekeeping on your shoulders, John makes you do all the sewing—including his clothes, I suppose—and treats you like a ten-year-old child. Even allowing for Clarence's passionate transports you seem to be quite painfully noble in your acquiescence. . . . I have come to see to this!"

Joy stiffened.

"Thank you, I am perfectly happy," she stated untruthfully. "Won't you sit down?"

Gail flung her hat and cloak on a distant settee, and dropped her grip at her feet.

"Not till I go up and see poor dear Mamma Hewitt," she answered. "Poor darling, she must be lonely!"

She sauntered out of the room, leaving Joy at the desk. She was down again in a few minutes. Gail never seemed to hurry. She merely got where she wanted to be with no visible effort. She nodded to Joy as she entered the room again, and dropped into a morris chair.

"Mrs. Hewitt says I am to go as far as I like," she informed Joy, half-amusedly. "Mother never seems to want any help at home, thank goodness, and all I have to do over there is to amuse little friends who drop in. You get tired of that after awhile. I told Clarence to send away any suitors who might trail over!"

She flung her arms up over her head and laughed a little to herself, stretching her whole indolent, graceful body.

"I like new things to amuse myself with," she informed Joy. "Now you'll send the maids in."

Joy did not like any of this. And she found herself more and more certain that she did not like Gail Maddox.

"If she has all those lovers," she thought resentfully, like a child, "why doesn't she stay home and play with them instead of coming over here where we were perfectly happy without her?"

But she was too proud to do anything about it, so instead of going up to Mrs. Hewitt's bedroom to appeal to Cæsar she went to the kitchen without further comment, and informed the maids that Mrs. Hewitt had decided Miss Maddox was to have charge for the day.

The lively chorus of growls with which this was received cheered Joy's unregenerate heart. She did not stay to either soothe or encourage the rebellion.

"I've told the maids," she said colorlessly to Gail, returning.

"Good infant," said Gail, and proceeded to gather the flowers out of the vases where Joy had herself arranged them a half-hour before, and rearrange them.

Joy watched her for a minute or so. Then—"You aren't going to need me?" she asked with a misleading quietness. "Because if you aren't I—I have something to do for a little while."

"Not a bit. Run along," granted Gail. "I'll have some toil ready for you when you get back, if you like."

Joy was like the lady in the poem, who died in such a hurry.

"She did not stop to don her coat,
She did not stop to smooth her bed."

She fled hatless in the direction of a place that had always meant soothed feelings and comfort generally, the Harrington house. Phyllis wouldn't be there, to be sure, but the place would have her peace and sunniness about it.

The children were ranging up and down the garden paths with squeals and shouts of happiness which were, apparently, merely because of life in general. They fell upon her with still wilder shouts; or at least Philip did, while Angela clung as far up as she could reach.

Joy hugged all the children she could reach with a

warm sense of gratitude to them for wanting her, and (still led by gratitude) entered enthusiastically into tag herself. It was quite new to her, because she had never played children's games, but she found that she liked it exceedingly. . . . Suppose Gail *did* go slidingly around explaining to everybody convincingly that everybody else was in love with her—suppose it was even true? Why, even then—when you're young and alive it's fun to go running up and down a garden in the stimulating October air.

They ended in the big swing. Philip insisted on doing most of the pushing, because, as he explained, they were all girls and he wasn't. Joy held little Angela fast, and gave herself up to the delight of being swung. Philip pushed her higher and higher, till they were both screaming with pleasure, and, when the swing was at the top, could see over the tall hedge to the road outside.

There was something chugging inquiringly out there. And it was—it was, indeed, John's little doctor-car. And it held John, and it was slowing up. As these facts, one by one, became apparent to Joy and Angela in their excursions above the hedge, there was great happiness in the garden.

"I knew he'd come!—He said he'd come!" announced Philip gleefully, pushing like mad. "He said he would! He's been here every day since they went. I asked him yesterday"—these sentences were inter-

spersed with the pantings necessary to pushing a swingful of ladies—"I asked him whyn't he stay for dinner, and he said—he said he wanted to go home an' have luncheon wiv Joy. So I s'pose he'll stay today, long's you're here."

In Joy's naughty mind a Great Idea sprang to birth. Whyn't he stay, indeed? He didn't know about Gail's coming to brighten his fireside, and there wasn't any reason why he should.

"He'll stay if I can make him," she told Philip gaily.

In the back of her head—she should unquestionably have had her hands slapped—there was a beautiful and complete picture of Gail being insolently alluring to three empty chairs and a luncheon table and four unoccupied walls.

"See John!" screamed Angela, trying to clap her hands, and having to be grabbed hastily so she shouldn't fall out of the swing. "Johnny! Johnny! Come in!"

John looked up in time to see the swing before it went downward again. He waved his hand as it came up, and the third time it rose Joy saw the car still, but no John. He was coming in.

He appeared a moment later, striding over the lawn. The children dashed for him, as usual.

"Johnny, Johnny!" they clamored. "She says you can stay to lunch! She says she will if you will."

With the way made so easy for her erring feet, what could Joy say but "Don't you want to?"

She did not insist.

But John accepted on the spot with unsuspecting heartiness, and Philip solved the last problem by scampering off over the rustling leaves to telephone that John wouldn't be home for luncheon.

So they had a very merry luncheon, though an occasional whiff of guilt made Joy fall silent—which was not noticeable, because Philip's conversation flowed on brightly in all the breaks, and sometimes when there weren't any.

"Want me to take you back, Joy?" John asked when they were done, looking down at her quizzically, as he had a trick of doing. "Gail must want you by this time."

"Gail!" stammered Joy. Then her courage came back, as it usually did when she summoned it, and she laughed.

"Heavens, I am discovered!" she quoted. "Why, John, you don't mean to tell me you ran away too?"

"*I* didn't run away," countered John. "I promised Philip yesterday that I'd stay here to luncheon with him. In fact, I think I promised to summon you. I stopped at the house to do it just now and found you here already. I explained matters to Gail, and she is up in Mother's room, having her luncheon there."

He turned to the children. "Say good-by to Joy now, infants—I'm going to take her away with me."

"You do that a great deal of the time, it seems to me," observed Philip regretfully. "But of course, I suppose she really does belong to you."

"Exactly," laughed John, lifting the little boy up to kiss him. "She does. Come, my property."

They got into the car amicably, laughing over Philip. But John wasn't through with her.

"Was it quite courteous, my dear," he asked gently, but with a certain firmness, "to leave Gail that way? It was only a chance that I was able to explain it. In a sense she was a guest in your house."

Joy flamed up.

"Was it quite courteous of Gail," she demanded passionately, "to come in and take my house away from me, and demand that I hand her over the housekeeping—no, not demand it, calmly take it?"

John looked a little perplexed for the moment, which gave Joy time to calm down a little, and remind herself that men *were* like that.

"Somehow one doesn't expect Gail to be considerate," he explained finally. "It—well, it isn't one of her qualities. I think I heard her say once that she had never found it necessary. But you—I expect so much more of you, Joy!"

One would suppose that this might have been soothing. John seemed to consider it so. But it wasn't.

"She's so charming that nobody expects anything else of her," Joy flashed back, "and I have to be good, because all people can like me for is my goodness—is that what you mean?"

And she stood up, as the car slowed before the Hewitt house, and sprang out. She had seen Clarence Rutherford sunning himself expectantly on the steps.

"There's the man who sent her over, if you approve of it all so highly," were her departing words to John. "I promise not to be inhospitable to *him!*"

She waved her hand.

"Mr. Rutherford!" she called. "Come on down and go off somewhere with me!"

Clarence unfolded himself with more haste than usual, and obliged.

"To the end of the world, Sorcerette, or any little place like that," he said sweetly. "I have no car, alas, but I can telephone for one."

"No, don't," said Joy, whose one idea was to get away. "Just go into the house and bring me my cap and any wrap you can find."

She did not dare look back to John. She felt she was being everything she oughtn't to, but she also felt that she had cause.

"Here's your hat," said Clarence, coming out with it, and refraining from completing the quotation. "Where do you want to go? I have many beautiful plans to offer you, principally about your being leading

lady in my comic opera. You are going to have to get an extension of parole from the dear ones at home."

"Oh, do you really think I can act in it?" asked Joy happily as they went down the leafy road together. She gave a little frisk as she spoke.

"Of course you can," said he. "As a matter of fact, that's my principal reason for getting it up. I have a book that contains all the Gilbert librettos in my most bulging pocket. You and I will wander out into the wonderful autumn woods, and sit down on a soft, pleasant log, and pick out the opera, and the cast, and be happy generally. Only I won't play unless, as I explained last night, you are a leading lady with a real star part. As I'm a wonderful stage manager I feel strongly that it will be thus."

"Thank you," said Joy amiably but absently. Something appalling had just occurred to her.

"Good gracious," she told him, "it's a special occasion, and the cook and the waitress are both going off to funerals or something, and Gail is going to have to get that whole dinner single-handed!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

DINNER FOR FIVE

CLARENCE smiled most agreeably.

"You should try to be more of an optimist, dear Joy," he reproved. "Try to live up to your name."

"I got it out of Blake," said Joy, "or they did—and I never did see why you should live up to a name your grandfather pinned on you out of a poetry book."

"Pardon this seeming curiosity," hinted Clarence, "but didn't you ever have any parents, not even to the extent of their having a chance to name you?"

"They died before I was born," Joy explained. "At least, as much as they could. My father quite did and my mother died before I was a week old. So Grandfather had it all to do, as far as naming went. You know that horrid poem—

"I have no name—
I am but three days old:"

"And it's called Infant Joy, and so was I."

"They seem to have begun wrecking your taste for literature early," observed Clarence.

"Oh—literature!" said Joy wearily.

"Your tone hints that we didn't come off to discuss the poets. You are quite right, Sorcerette. When two charming young persons like ourselves are alone together on a wonderful fall afternoon they should discuss only each other. And you must admit that my references to literature were only incidental to yourself."

"Well, anyway," stated Joy, pausing as they strolled, and beginning to braid into a garland a handful of wild asters she had gathered, "anyway, I ought to go back to the house and help Gail get dinner. John likes things just so."

"Heavens, how marital!" sighed Clarence, wincing. Then suddenly he seemed more in earnest than Joy had ever known him. "Can't you ever talk or think of anything but the admirable John? How on earth did he get you so thoroughly broken in?"

Joy's cheeks flamed.

"He didn't 'break me in,'" she defended. "But I think I ought to see to it that things are all right. You see, when your cousin came and offered to take over the housekeeping—if she wasn't your cousin, I might say she got it away from me—she thought she was helping herself to a 'nice, clane, aisy job,' as the Irishman said about being a bishop. It really isn't fair to let her in for work she didn't expect."

The look Clarence bent on her this time held genuine admiration.

"I think it is exceedingly fair," was all he said.

"Really?" she asked. She certainly did not want to go back to the house, and, noble as Clarence might think her, she didn't feel a bit like taking orders from Gail.

"She has made her bed—or it may even be, her beds," said Clarence. "Now why don't you let her lie in it, or them?"

"Well, I don't want to go home," said Joy a little sadly.

"Let us be optimists, as I suggested some yards back," said Clarence cheerfully. "Let us think of the wonderful effect it will all have on Gail's moral nature. By the time she has produced the eight-course dinner which I gather the worthy Dr. Hewitt requires to keep him the good citizen he is, she will be ennobled to a terrible degree. You have heard of the ennobling influence of toil, dear child?"

"I have, but I never believed in it," said Joy. "It makes you cross, especially peeling potatoes, and it's bad for your hands. And judging by the number of maids who steal, it doesn't work at all."

"I suppose," Clarence resigned himself, "that if Melisande were still spared to us in the flesh, she really would have talked this way, except that she would have used a few more dots. But one is an idealist. One is jarred. If you could recite, in your soft, clear-cut voice that is so admirably adapted for

poetry, a few stanzas of something heartbreaking——" voluntarily.

Joy, not unnaturally, lost patience.

"I have spent my whole life, or a lot more of it than I want to, reciting heartbreaking poetry," she told him. "If you want it, go buy a phonograph record. And if you want me out here in the woods with you, stop talking about it!"

She really shouldn't have been so cross. Clarence was supposed to be very clever when he talked. But just then she was only half listening to him, and there came a sudden vision of the night before—the cozy room, and the wood fire, and John across from her, smiling gravely at her, and talking in a way that didn't make her feel, as Clarence's way did, that he was laughing at her underneath, when he thought she couldn't see.

John had told her once that his ideal girl wore something white or blue, and had her hair parted, and was connected in his mind some way with a wood fire. And he had talked and acted as if she was that girl. She'd had on the little blue dress that she'd bought, and made look modern with a fichu of Mrs. Hewitt's. . . .

Clarence's voice interrupted her thoughts, rather plaintively.

"Dear Joy! I *will* buy a phonograph record! I will buy a whole album of them. I will purchase a copy of the Last Ravings of John McCullough, and

have it rave to me the last thing every night, as a penance, if you will only stop looking off into space, and give at least a fair imitation of knowing that I exist."

Joy's heart misgave her. She really wasn't being very polite.

"Of course you exist," she said penitently. "And you are very nice and polite, in your way, and you must make allowance for my not being clever. I keep telling you that all the time."

"I am delighted that you are not, as you call it, clever," said Clarence with undoubted sincerity. "You lack verbal dexterity of a certain kind, because you have never associated freely with people you could be disrespectful to. But you are quite a new kind of girl, or else a survival, and I adore you for it. I never thought I was going to adore any one so much. Why, I even think it is humorous when you sit on me, and that, my dear, is a very bad symptom. In short, I am very much in love with you."

Clarence had a habit of talking that way, and Joy didn't pay much attention to it. In a phrase of his own, it was like kissing over the telephone—it didn't get you anywhere, but it had a cunning sound. It has a warming feeling to think that any one is in love with you, even if you know they aren't. She said as much.

But Clarence became what was, for him, sulky. Clarence had one curious thing about him: he never

showed his temper at all, but you couldn't be with him ten minutes without being morally certain that he had a very bad and sullen one, which he merely kept concealed for reasons of his own. Whereas John Hewitt's temper, which undisguisedly was in existence, wasn't a thing you ever thought of excepting rather amusedly and affectionately. It was such a little-boy thing in comparison with the grown-up, responsible rest of him! It would undoubtedly appear some time this afternoon or evening. At the thought of it Joy felt her usual affectionate amusement. When it was over he would be very sorry.

"You haven't told me anything about the comic opera yet," she hinted to Clarence, who had been quite silent for the last while. "Don't you want to?"

"I do!" said Clarence, coming out of his muse and turning into his ordinary self. "We will sit down on the next stump or stone we see, and go into the matter thoroughly."

It was a large flat stone, with a tree for Joy to lean against. They sat down on it, and Clarence pulled the libretto book out of his pocket, and they went to work.

Joy knew the Gilbert and Sullivan operas from a copy of the words that had always been around the house. So there was no delay while she read the book through, as Clarence seemed to have expected.

"To my mind it lies between 'Patience' and 'Iolanthe,'" said Clarence. "The 'Mikado' has been

done to death, and so has 'Trial by Jury.' And 'Princess Ida' is too full of blank verse, and the men's solos are too hard."

So far as Joy was concerned nothing had been done to death. She would quite willingly have been the humblest chorus-girl in "Pinafore," if Clarence had willed to have that much-done classic. But he seemed determined to have her play a large part in whatever it was, and to have whatever it was *Iolanthe.* He wanted to be *Strephon,* it seemed; in fact, he had been. And he wanted Joy for the *Phyllis* or *Iolanthe.*

Joy had a faint feeling that Phyllis Harrington ought to have the part with her own name, but Clarence explained that names had nothing whatever to do with it unless you were a movie star, when you used your first name in order to make the public more interested in your personality.

"We will give Gail the part you don't want," he told her, "as a punishment for not letting you cook your eight-course dinner tonight. By the way, we must time ourselves to get back and eat it. I wonder whether Gail can cook. On second thoughts, why not stay out till it's over?"

"The play!" said Joy imperatively.

"Well," he said, yielding, "would you rather be a fairy princess or a shepherdess from Arcady? I'd prefer to have you the shepherdess, for personal reasons. I wish to be the shepherd."

"Whatever you say," said Joy absently. "It's getting colder. Hadn't we better walk a little?"

"Very well," said Clarence. "We can argue as we walk."

The problem of making sixteen young women willing to be a chorus and of finding sixteen or twenty young men to be anything, took them quite a while to discuss. They walked on as they talked, until it began to get darker.

"By the way, have you any idea where we are?" inquired Clarence, stopping short to look about him. "New England woods are not my native habitat."

"Nor mine," said Joy, startled. "I think we ought to go back to the high road."

"If there's any left to go back to," suggested Clarence. "We've been on one way-path after another so long that I don't think I could find it again."

They turned around, and continued to follow way-paths back. Clarence had no pocket compass, such as people who get lost ought to possess. And it was getting relentlessly darker and darker. Joy had never been lost before, and she was surprised to find the feeling of panic that possessed her when she grasped the fact that neither of them knew where they were. Finally they gained a clear space where there was a tolerably traveled-looking road.

"If we wait here somebody may come along," said Clarence. "Jove, I'm hungry!"

"So am I," said Joy.

But there wasn't anything to do about *that*. Finally Joy remembered that she had some chocolate in her little handbag, and they divided it and ate it. After that life was a little brighter.

"Do you suppose we'll have to stay here all night?" demanded Joy. "We'll freeze to death if we do."

"No, I don't," said Clarence. "But, Joy dear, if we do——"

The mockery was all out of his voice.

"Oh, don't talk about it!" she exclaimed. "Surely somebody will come get us—or couldn't we go up this road till we find a farmhouse?"

"If you like," said Clarence.

They rose and walked on for a while.

"Oh, listen!" Joy whispered. "I hear something!"

"It's a car," said Clarence hopefully.

And it was. It was John's car, with John in it, and the temper Joy had been thinking of tenderly was with him. He was evidently thoroughly angry, for he scarcely spoke, even when he found them.

"See here, Hewitt," Clarence protested. "You aren't doing the thing at all properly. You should say, 'My own! At last I have found you!' instead of backing up the car with a short sentence like that."

What John had said, as a matter of fact, was, "Get in the car. It's late."

He did come to a little at Clarence's flippant reminder, and smiled reluctantly.

"Well, you see, it was self-evident. I *had* found you both. You oughtn't to have walked so far if you didn't know where you were going."

"It is also self-evident that it is late," said Clarence stiffly, and, it must be confessed, a little sulkily. "Nevertheless, we're having a very pleasant time. . . . Is dinner over?"

John, for no apparent reason, smiled frankly at this. "Not in the least," he said. "They are waiting dinner till the prodigals' return. My mother has had hers sent up to her, but Gail and your friend Tiddy are kindly keeping the rest of it hot."

It is a quicker journey in a car than when you stroll leisurely along, discussing light opera and your disposition. They were surprised to find how near, comparatively, they were, to the village.

"Joy, do you suppose I am invited to dinner?" asked Clarence in a stage whisper. "If it is not thus I shall probably starve by the roadside, because Gail sent her mother to a bridge-and-high-tea before she went, and the maids there had no orders about food. That's why I was prowling about the hospitable Hewitt mansion."

Joy couldn't help smiling. "I think you must be," she said.

But she didn't understand John's allusion to Tiddy.

He was abjectly devoted to Gail, but it did seem that devotion had its limits, when it came to following her to somebody else's house.

"What is Tiddy doing in these parts?" Clarence asked for her, as people so often do ask your questions for you if you only give them time. "Dinner-party, is it?"

"Tiddy," said John dryly, "is making himself useful."

"That is nothing at all new in Tiddy's life," said Gail's cousin. "People who dwell about Gail *do*. Am I to understand that he is chief cook and bottle-washer?"

"You are," said John.

They got out and went into the house, Joy feeling as mussy as only a girl can who has been away from home all day. She followed the curious-minded Clarence into the kitchen.

The sight that met their eyes was an interesting one. The kitchen was a pleasant sight to any one from outside, being warmed and lighted. It was further decorated by Gail, in a very low and clinging black frock trimmed with poppies, which it occurred to Joy must have been in the grip. She was sitting in absolute idleness in a kitchen chair, with her feet on a footstool, and Tiddy, swathed in an apron with pink checks, was engaged at the kitchen range.

"Good work, old boy!" Clarence called out to him. "What have you got?"

Tiddy turned a scarlet face toward him, and waved one hand, with a spoon in it.

"Gail said there had to be a good dinner," he said worriedly, "but I don't know how to make many things. This is soup. . . . It doesn't look right to me, somehow. Come here, Clarence, and give it a once over."

Joy, leaning against the lintel with John a little behind her as usual, couldn't help but admire Gail. She knew perfectly well that it would never have occurred to her in Gail's place to sit placidly in a chair while a lad who ought to have been at home studying—Tiddy was cramming to catch up with his class at college—wrestled with the stove. But, after all, that was the sort of thing she had always read of sirens doing. And even if the victim was only a little college boy, of what Clarence called frying size, it was a sight to make one wishful. Also apprehensive—mightn't Gail set John peeling potatoes next? That sight would be an annoying one from various angles.

John showed no signs of being about to yield, at least at the moment. He joined Clarence in teasing Tiddy, who took it very sweetly, but he finally came forward and showed the lad how to manage the drafts.

"Call us when you're ready, Cookie," said Clarence amiably, and sauntered out. John followed him.

"Can't I help?" asked Joy, staying conscientiously behind. She still felt that it was her responsibility.

"Not a bit," said Gail. "We're getting along wonderfully. You'd better go up and get straightened out, though—you look blown to bits. Oh, and send John back as you go through, Tiddy can't do the drafts right."

Joy went out obediently.

"John, I am to send you back as I go through. Tiddy can't do the drafts right," she repeated in a colorless voice that had anger underneath it, and walking on as she spoke.

"Drafts—nonsense—Gail's lonesome," Clarence answered cheerfully, from the couch where he had thrown himself.

"All right," said John, who was the soul of politeness, but an annoyingly dense person compared to Clarence, it seemed to Joy. He went out. Joy ran upstairs as fast as she could go. She arrived at the top, breathless and still angry, and remembered that she ought to go in and see Mrs. Hewitt. But the lights were low, generally a sign that the lady was asleep, so she went on to her own room.

"Blown to bits!" she said to herself bitterly, stopping opposite her confidant, the mirror. "And *she* sitting on a chair looking like Marie Antoinette being taken to execution in a kitchen chair!"

It was a breathless and tautological remark, but it

relieved her feelings. "I oughtn't to feel that way," she reminded herself. "Because after all, Gail *was* here first!"

This didn't seem to make much difference in the feelings. And it was unquestionable that she was blown about, and very young and owned no black dress with poppies, nor yet any college boy who would cook for her at a wave of the hand.

She pawed her wardrobe through furiously. Joy was always very dependent for encouragement on the clothes she wore. The proper gown could make her feel the way it looked, always. They almost had moods sewed into them around the bottom, she thought sometimes.

The way she had felt last time she wore the amber satin with the poem to it, that one she had hated so furiously—could she feel that way again if she put on the dress? She'd felt young—oh, yes, but as if youth were a perfectly splendid thing to have. And very alive, and superior, and rebellious. And ready to have a lover, and to treat him, if necessary, like a dog—like a whole kennel of dogs!

So she put it on. She made herself exactly the little princess of Grandfather's reception days, trailing chiffon panels, swinging jewel-filleted braids and all, and swept downstairs with her head high.

Tiddy had by this time managed to get the dinner on the table, and the other two men, out of sheer pity,

were helping him. In fact, having enthroned Gail at the table, they were making a frolic of the whole thing.

"Here, catch the steak, Rutherford," John was saying cheerfully. And Clarence, with carving-knife and fork outheld, was making as neat a catch as possible.

"Here, Tiddy, don't try to stagger in along under those biscuits. You made 'em. That kind takes two strong men—I know, I've eaten your biscuits before."

"I made these the regular way, with yeast," said Tiddy in an injured voice. "*I* couldn't help it if they didn't rise in the oven. Go rag the cookbook."

Joy could stand it no longer. Forgetting her real state, she rushed out on them, where they wrestled with the dinner and Tiddy. They were playing handball with the biscuits by this time.

"Oh, *Tiddy!* You didn't put *yeast* in those biscuits!" she reproached him. "Why, you poor unfortunate boy, yeast has to rise over night, or an afternoon anyhow! They're no use!"

They all three stopped simultaneously at the vision which she had quite honestly forgotten she presented. Tiddy listened humbly, and Clarence made a low bow.

"The Queen came in the kitchen, speaking bread and honey," he quoted appositely, while John looked both pleased and proud.

"There, I told you so," he said with triumph. "I

said you were in wrong with those biscuits. Joy always knows."

" ' It was the very *best* butter,' " quoted Tiddy (who was not without a sense of humor), from " Alice."

" But what can we do? " asked John, who was concentrated on the situation. " The steak's all right—any idiot can broil steak, as Tiddy has proved—" he had to stop short to dodge a biscuit—" and the soup came out of a can, so maybe that'll do. But there isn't a bit of bread, and we simply have to have it. At least I suppose so."

" Get me an apron, please," Joy asked of the surroundings, and two aprons were offered her excitedly by three willing hands. She pinned both on, as a precaution against ruining the amber satin, though she didn't much mind if it had been ruined, and began by investigating the soup. It was the best canned tomato bisque, but its cook had not known or read that it should be watered, or milked, and it was so thick it was almost stiff. She sent Clarence for milk out of the refrigerator, and treated it properly. Then she looked at the biscuits, such as had escaped destruction. They were indeed hopeless.

" I can make biscuits in a minute, but it will take a half-hour to bake them in this range," she told them, where they stood, anxiously awaiting her verdict. " If you didn't mind having them baked on a griddle——"

" Like the ones the fellow does in the window at

Childs'! Fine!" responded Tiddy enthusiastically. "I'll get the griddle. I've learned where everything grows."

He produced it accordingly, and watched Joy, as did the others, entranced, while she mixed and cut out biscuits, and baked them in the griddle scone-fashion.

They made it a triumphal procession after that, with the biscuits borne high by Tiddy before Joy, who came in carrying the steak, followed by Clarence and John with a dish of canned vegetables apiece. It was far from being the dinner Joy had planned, but the biscuits were greatly admired, and every one was happy. That is, Joy was, and apparently the men were. Joy was so pleased to think that she had been able to straighten out things, and get them a good dinner, that she forgot to think about Gail at all. She sat in the tall armchair at the head of the table where John had placed her, and poured coffee in big cups, to be taken with the dinner, with flushed cheeks and a gay heart.

"But what I want to know is," demanded Clarence, "why nobody's ever seen that frock before."

"I have," John answered from the foot. "Joy had that on the very first time I saw her, amber beads and crown and all. I never thought then I'd see her making my biscuits in it."

"It's an allegory," said Clarence. "Man captures the beautiful princess of his dream, and sets her to

drudging in his kitchen. *I* think there is something sad but sweet, as Shaw would say, about it."

"But I wanted to make the biscuits!" cried Joy before she thought. "If I hadn't there wouldn't have been any for dinner—and you *had* to have dinner."

"They didn't at all," said Gail. "You spoil men. If you always say, 'But he has to have it!' and then go tearing around getting it for him, why——"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"There are excellent biscuits a half-mile away, at the baker's in the village, and a motor-car outside."

Joy laughed blithely.

"But you see, I'm not used to a motor-car. I'm not motor-people at all. . . . Well, I suppose when you live with a poet you get in the habit of feeling you must do what people want of you. Grandfather was so great, you see, we felt it was—well, only polite. At least Grandmother brought me up that way."

"I—I say! Was your grandfather *the* Alton Havenith!" exclaimed Tiddy, opening his eyes widely. "The one in all the readers and cram-books and anthologies?"

"Is," corrected Joy. "He's quite alive. Yes, that's Grandfather—and this is one of my dresses for his receptions," she added as an afterthought.

"Good *gracious!*" breathed Tiddy reverently. They were at the canned peaches and pound-cake by this time. "I—I suppose you couldn't say any of his

things?" he ended diffidently. He was evidently a worshiper.

Joy felt quite herself by now, the old self-possessed Joy of the salon and recitations.

"Well, not over the dessert," she said, laughing. "But as soon as dinner is over, if you want me to. There's one I say to a harp. There's a harp here."

"Can you play a harp, too?" demanded Clarence, "as well as make biscuits? See here, Tiddy, you forget your position in life. You're a cook. Get thee to the kitchen, while Joy entertains us, who are the real quality folks."

"Nonsense," smiled John. "We'll leave things as they are—can't we, Joy?"

He led the way into the parlor and uncovered the harp for her. No one would have guessed by his demeanor that this was the first sign he had had of Joy's accomplishment—he was as matter-of-fact as possible about it. Only once he smiled across at her secretly, as if they had something private between them, as she asked him which thing he thought she had better say to begin with, and named one immediately.

She flung back the chiffon that trailed down one slim, round arm, and, after a little preliminary tuning, began to play. It was "To Myrtilla at Seventeen" that John had suggested, and harp-music went well with it. Then she went on to more. She had never

thought that Grandfather would help her this way!

They kept her at the harp most of the evening. From Grandfather's poems she slid to some of Grandmother's old songs, plaintive old things of Civil War days. She was earnestly trying to make her guests and John's have as good a time as lay in her power, and she never thought about Gail, quiet and quite out of the center of the stage, at all.

Tiddy, rapt and worshipful, clung close to her till the evening was over.

"I say," he told her when the others were going, "you—do you know, you're wonderful! I—do you mind if I come over tomorrow? There's a lot of things I'd like to ask you about Alton Havenith. I—could I?"

"Why, of course," said Joy, with her usual eager desire to do anything nice she could for people.

He thanked her fervently, and went with obvious reluctance. Gail was a little silent, even for her, who only talked when she chose. And at last Joy and John were alone. She felt a little shy of him.

"I must go clear up," she said presently, as he did not speak, moving toward the dining-room.

"You must not," he told her, with the affectionate note in his voice she loved to hear. "I want to stay here and appreciate my princess a little, and I can't do it well when she's away—or I don't want to. Sit down, Joy. I scarcely ever see anything of you any

more. . . . Dear child, why on earth did you let Gail rampage all over the house this way? You could have had a maid in from the village."

"But she said she was going to—and I thought you knew!" cried Joy, her heart leaping up.

"Oh, you mean she took possession?" he said. "I see. That is like Gail. Well—don't let her, next time, my dear."

"I'd much, much rather not!" said Joy enthusiastically, "but she said she'd made it all right with your mother, and——"

"Oh, in that case," said John, "all right." Then he dismissed the subject, looking into the fire. "I find out some new thing about you every day, kiddie," he said. "I'm afraid I must seem like a rather quiet and unaccomplished person to you,—compared to other men."

"You mean because I ran off with Clarence," said Joy with remorseful directness, and her usual child-likeness. "I *was* cross because you liked Gail."

He laughed. "And *I* was cross because you liked Clarence. Shall we both reform a bit, little girl?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Joy radiantly. "Only I haven't much to reform about," she added thoughtfully. "Except he's kind to me, and he understands things sometimes you don't. . . ."

John sighed a little. "I see. Yes, he's that sort.

Well, try to make me understand, dear, won't you? . . . I want to."

She slipped her hand impulsively in his as she did sometimes.

"Then that's all right," he said contentedly.

But the most all right thing, to Joy's unregenerate heart, was next morning, when she went up to pay her usual morning visit to Mrs. Hewitt.

"Joy, will you tell me," demanded the lady, "what you meant by telling Gail you wanted her to do the housekeeping?"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF "IOLANTHE"

THERE was no use having it out with Gail. Joy was not one of those nerve-shaking people who insist on having things out, anyhow. She was perfectly content with things as they were.

The weather settled down to be legitimate October weather, a little early: crisply lovely outdoors, and of the temperature to be an excuse for fires indoors at night. Tiddy transferred his allegiance, still a little shyly, to Joy. The change was good for him, because they were, after all, very much of an age. They got to be excellent friends. Also Joy kept him at his studies in a fashion that was, for her, quite severe: he had asked her if she wouldn't, and she did. She went off for tramps with him when John was otherwise employed, which seemed to please John, and prevented her from having Clarence too much underfoot.

Gail referred to Tiddy's desertion with her usual note of indolent amusement—it did not occur to Joy till years later that Gail might occasionally pretend a superiority to such things as annoy other girls—and

summoned another man from the city for week-ends. Tiddy was indigenous to the soil. This, as Clarence, with *his* amiable superiority, said, was so much to the good, for when you come to amateur theatricals every man is a man. Clarence was working with an industry nobody would ever have suspected in him, over "Iolanthe."

It was easy enough to collect the principals. With a certain amount of nobility of character, Clarence assigned himself the part of *Lord Chancellor*, remarking that he could make a fool of himself rather better than most men he knew. Incidentally he played opposite to Joy, who refused flatly to take the leading part of *Phyllis,* and was therefore cast for *Iolanthe.* They found a suitable and sufficiently stalwart *Fairy Queen* in the neighborhood, and made Gail's week-end man *Private Willis,* because two rehearsals a week were enough for that part, and he was the tallest man, nearly, that any one had ever seen. He was six feet three and a half, which is about two and a half inches more than is necessary for beauty and suitability, to quote Clarence again; but quite what they wanted just here.

"But where on earth to get a chorus!" wailed Clarence, after a rehearsal in the big Hewitt parlor. They were keeping it more or less a family affair. The Harringtons had returned, bringing the De Guenthers with them in triumph. Mrs. De Guenther was a dear

little old lady who took a deep interest in the whole scheme, and was of great use in the costuming. Mr. De Guenther, scholarly, soft-voiced, and courteously precise, was also allowed to be present at rehearsals; not because of the costuming, but because he remembered performances at the Savoy when he was a young man in London, and could coach them in the business.

"With a whole village full of people, I should think you could!" said Gail. "The trouble with you is, Clarry, you're lazy." She leaned back herself in a long chair as she said it, looking the personification of indolence.

"Of course I could!" he said scornfully. "My good girl, have you seen the worthy New Englanders in this village? There are some of the most beautiful characters, hereabouts, I was told when I went seeking for chorus-ladies, that ever existed. But they are far from being worn on the outside."

"Laura Ward is coming down over that week, to stay with me," Gail offered.

"Yes, and Laura Ward has played *Celia,* and is going to have to do it again," stated Clarence. "We can't waste a good dancer like that on the chorus."

John, who was *Lord Mountararat,* one of *Phyllis'* two suitors from the House of Lords, was looking out of the window absently, humming under his breath one of his songs:

"It seems that she's a fairy
*From Andersen's lib*rary
And we took her for
The proprietor
*Of a Ladies' Sem*inary!"

One of the unaccountable silences which sometimes fall made every absently-sung word quite audible. As he ended Clarence sprang at him in what would have been a wild embrace if he had not ducked in time.

"Here, don't let your troubles drive you crazy, Rutherford," John protested, holding him off with a strong hand.

"They haven't!" proclaimed Clarence. "But 'them beautiful words!' See here, you dwellers in this happy vale, isn't there a girls' school somewhere adjacent? Why don't we bribe the teachers by making it a benefit for whatever they want—a stained glass window to their founder, or a new laboratory or something—and lift those girls bodily, as a chorus?"

They had been seeking painfully for some worthy object to give the opera for, and so far hadn't been able to find a thing. So his project was greeted joyfully.

"John, as usual, will have to go ask," suggested Allan. "Johnny, old boy, what *would* we do without your reputation? You physish at that school, and I hear they kiss your very shadow."

"It's probably all they get a chance at," Gail kindly helped John out.

John, who was wildly adored, as a matter of fact, by most of the fifteen-year-olds of the school, said "Nonsense!" sternly.

"Oh, do!" begged Tiddy. Tiddy was *Strephon,* the leading juvenile, "a fairy down to his waist," and was passionately anxious to have the whole thing go through. "If you will *I'll* go and see what I can yank out of my old prep school. There ought to be enough boys with changed voices and long legs——"

"Harold Gray, you are inspired!" said Gail, for once shaken out of her indolence. *She* had taken unto herself the part of *Phyllis* and was also anxious for the success of "Iolanthe." "And I myself will go with you. I'll go work my rabbit's foot on the masters. There's one over there who has already known my fatal charm."

"You mean the rabbit's foot, or——"

"I mean that one of the masters is in love with me. The classical master. We'll work him," stated Gail brutally.

"If you can make him sell you sixteen boys into slavery your fatal charm has been some use for once," said Clarence, unruffled.

Phyllis and John, who were the most serious-minded of the roomful, saw breakers ahead, but they said nothing.

"My dear, I *don't* think the way Miss Maddox talks is nice," whispered Mrs. De Guenther, who had taken to Joy as all old ladies did.

"Don't worry, dear," murmured Phyllis from the other side of her. "Other people don't, either. But nobody takes her seriously."

It was a light in Joy's mind on Gail. *Nobody took her seriously.* She was just a reckless, erratic creature who said and did as she pleased, and paid the penalty. Joy never felt so in awe of Gail again.

"It is a very modern school," said Phyllis to the company in her sweet, carrying voice. "The teachers are quite in favor of esthetic dancing, I know, and I am sure if you had two or three of the teachers in it, too, to look after the girls, there would be no difficulty. I will go and ask, if you like. We need a *Leila* and *Fleta.*"

"Oh, say, Mrs. Harrington, I thought you were going to be one of those, at least!" protested Tiddy, to whom it seemed a shame that Phyllis' golden loveliness should be wasted. Allan was *Lord Tolloller,* the other suitor, but Phyllis preferred, she said, to be generally useful. She was practically understudy to every one in the place, having a quick memory and a good ear, and spent her time, besides, hearing parts. Her real reason for not wanting to play was that she was afraid the De Guenthers would be left too much

to themselves if she was tied up to rehearsals. Clarence worked every one mercilessly.

She shook her head good-naturedly.

"I shall probably have to take the leading man's part on the night," she told him. "Oh, I forgot it was you, Tiddy—I beg your pardon. Well, Clarence's, then. And until that awful moment, let me be happy in obscurity!"

Joy, who had *Iolanthe's* long, hard part to learn, and was delighted with the idea, fixed her eyes on the opposite wall and tried to remember what she had to say first. She was staying on by special permission, for the opera. Mrs. Hewitt herself had written Grandmother. Grandfather, very much pleased at the idea that Joy had inherited another form of his own talent, had said she could stay the full week of the performance. As they planned to give it on a Tuesday night, this was almost a week to the good.

"Then it's settled that Mrs. Harrington and Gail, with as many more as are needed, go chorus-hunting tomorrow," said Clarence with finality. "Now we'll start that 'When darkly looms the day' duet. Tiddy, Joy! Look interested, please. Bang the piano, if you don't mind, Mrs. Harrington. Now!"

Joy and Tiddy accordingly burst into song, assisted by Allan and John. Mrs. Hewitt, who had to be very stealthy about coming in, because she had been put out several times for talking in the middle of some exciting

moment, slid into a chair beside the De Guenthers, and behaved nobly. She was quite able to be around now, and Joy was beginning to feel that she ought to accede to Phyllis' requests to go back and stay with them a while. The children demanded her daily.

"I do hope the gate receipts will be more than the expenses," Clarence said hopefully in a resting-space. "The last time I got up anything like this we cleared just two dollars. We'd formally dedicated it to a Home for the Aged, in the blessed hope that the directresses would sell tickets enough to fill the hall. But they didn't. They took our two dollars away from us just the same. I always begrudged them that two-spot."

"If you have the girls' school in it that can't happen," Gail reminded him. "They're little demons at ticket-selling."

So next day Phyllis took Joy with her, and also the De Guenthers as an evidence of deep respectability, and they drove over to the school, and actually secured the co-operation of the girls and their teachers. The thing was being so hurried through, as amateur theatricals should be to go well, that the whole thing would be over in two and a half weeks more. As Phyllis was personally very much liked by the principal, there was very little trouble made about it. Indeed, the teachers planned to take notes and borrow costumes, and give

the thing themselves as a commencement entertainment the next June, if it proved possible.

The boys were rather harder to get, but here, too, they succeeded, finally. And "Iolanthe" went prosperously on.

In a couple more days Phyllis, who really could get almost anything she wanted from almost anybody, if she took the trouble, coaxed Joy back from Mrs. Hewitt.

"You'll have her most of the rest of your natural life," she pleaded. "And I saw her first. I think I ought to have her now."

So Mrs. Hewitt reluctantly gave her up, and she went back to the Harrington house.

She saw scarcely less of John, because he continued to come regularly to see them in the mornings on his way home, and generally got in a little visit in the afternoons, not counting the fact that he took her on his rounds with him three days out of five. And then, of course, there were the rehearsals.

"My dear," he remonstrated with her, as they were on their way home from one of these, "I don't want to seem to scold you, but you shouldn't let young Gray put his arm around you the way he does."

"Put his arm around me?" demanded Joy, quite honestly surprised. "Why, what do you mean? Oh —the rehearsals! Why—why, John! You and Allan have to put your arms around Gail every little while,

and so does everybody else. And I'm supposed to be *Strephon's* mother. People have to, in theatricals."

"Clarence seems to think so," said John dryly, and Joy turned her head to look at him more closely in the moonlight.

"And now Clarence! Little Philip Harrington does, too, and I suppose you'll be telling me to have him stop next!"

But at the scorn in her voice John only became firmer.

"Gail Maddox is entirely different," he explained. It seemed to Joy that if he had offered her that explanation once he had a hundred times.

"Gail is not different," said Joy firmly. "Anyway, Tiddy is just a baby."

John could not help laughing.

"He's not the only one who is just a baby," he said. "You little goose, he's three or four years older than you . . . and heaven knows how much younger than I am." The thought of that, for some strange reason, worked a change in his mind. "Never mind me, little girl. I suppose I'm unreasonable."

"Well, yes, I think you are," said Joy honestly. Then she laughed. It was very comfortable to have John jealous, even if it *was* silly of him. "All right, John, hereafter I will wear a wire cage whenever I have any scenes with Tiddy."

"Better wear it when you have scenes with Clar-

ence," said John rather sharply. "And let me tell you, a man that will try to steal——"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Joy calmly again. "First you say that Clarence is toying with me, then you say he's trying to steal me. Now it stands to reason he can't do both."

She was so practical about it that John stopped in spite of himself.

"I'm afraid I'm too much given to thinking people want to steal you," he said a little soberly.

Joy wondered for the thousandth time about the nature of men. . . . Sometimes she almost thought she had made John care a good deal for her. And then again, when he rose up and defended Gail, she quite thought she hadn't. But as for Clarence, all that was very foolish. From the time she had seen him every one in the village who had come near her, it seemed to her, had carefully made it plain that Clarence was a male flirt, a love pirate, a gay deceiver, a trifler, a person with no intentions—anything but a man who was in love with her. He had practically said so himself, as far as she could remember. And she had been very pleased with the idea, and enjoyed his behavior—happy in the belief that everything he said had a stout string to it—very much. Even John admitted that he was amusing, and certainly he was good-looking and clever.

But she smiled up at John.

"It is very nice of you to feel that way," she said. "I appreciate it."

"You annoying little person!" he replied, half-laughing. "Joy, if I hadn't learned that you were one of the most honest, straightforward girls in the world, sometimes I would think you were a good deal of a coquette."

"We're here," said Joy irrelevantly for an answer. She still wished she knew more about men.

Phyllis' remark about being useful seemed to be in a fair way to be fulfilled. Allan threatened to put out a sign, he said, on the front gate, "No coaching done between twelve and three A.M." Finally he did discover an excellent scheme, which consisted of making the house and garden look deserted, and locking himself and Phyllis in the library most of the day.

"It's rather pleasant," he informed her. "Since I developed this plan I'm really getting more of your uninterrupted society than I have since this terrible "Iolanthe" devastated the village. . . . Just why did it happen, Phyllis—have you any idea?"

"Speak lower," said Phyllis. "I'm perfectly certain I heard footsteps."

"Probably a deputation from Miss Addams' school, to ask you whether the right or left foot comes first," her husband answered her quite accurately.

"But, Allan dear," protested Phyllis, "you know perfectly well that if I don't go out and stem the tide

they will find Joy, and tear the child away from the first moment she's had with John alone since I don't know when."

"This is the first moment I've had alone with you since I don't know when," he answered, unmoved, coming over and putting both arms around her, to draw her resolutely away from the door. "And if you will consider carefully, my darling, you will remember that Joy is much younger than either of us, and hence has many more years to spend with John than you have with me. Now cease to be a slave to duty, or whatever it is, and come sit on the arm of my chair."

"You'll never grow up!" said Phyllis protestingly; but she ceased to be a slave to duty immediately, and sat on the arm of his chair until he pulled her down on his lap, which he did almost on the spot.

Meanwhile Joy, walking up and down in the garden paths and memorizing her part, had been found by John, who was trying to lure her off for a ride.

"Nobody can find us on a galloping car," he said persuasively.

But Joy was more steadfast than Phyllis.

"I expect Tiddy over to rehearse with me," she said. "He will be here in about five minutes. You know that 'Good morrow, good mother' thing that he has to do prancing in and playing on a pipe. And none of us can make out what a pipe is. Tiddy says

if there's no further light on it by next rehearsal he's going to use a meerschaum."

"You might let me rehearse with you," grumbled John. "Every time I come near I find you dancing hand-in-hand with Tiddy or Clarence or Mrs. Beeson" (Mrs. Beeson was the gigantic Fairy Queen) "or sewing on some wild thing for some seminary child."

"Some of those seminary children are only a year younger than I am," she reminded him. "But if you would like to rehearse your part with me you'll have to go find Allan. All your scenes are with him."

"Allan has a well-trained wife and a lock on his door," said John, who didn't in the least need to rehearse. "I have neither. Mother has made our house a happy hunting-ground, and at this moment Gail and Tiddy and Clarence are putting the Chorus of Peers through its paces. They aren't properly hand-picked. One of 'em squeaks."

"They had to pick him, because he was so grand and tall," Joy explained. "He isn't supposed to sing. I suppose he got carried away."

"Suppose you get carried away," coaxed John, returning to the charge.

"Now, John, you know the thing is to be given in a week," remonstrated Joy. "And I have heaps to learn, and any amount more to sew."

"Nevertheless—" said John, and suddenly laughed and tried to pick her up. He was very strong, and she

was light and little, but she resisted valiantly. They were laughing and struggling like a couple of children, when they heard footsteps, and shamefacedly composed themselves to look very civilized. The choruses were all over the village at all times of the day and night after study hours, and John specially had to look after his decorum in their presence. But it was only Philip.

"Seems to me it would be pleasanter," he remarked without preface, "if Angela and I had parts in this play. Angela thinks so, too."

"Where is Angela?" asked Joy idly.

"I put her up a tree," said Philip. "She's playing she's a little birdie. You haven't got any candy that we could play was worms, have you, Johnny?" he finished insinuatingly.

But John and Joy had heard a wail in the direction whence Philip had come, and neither of them stopped to reply. Angela alone and up a tree was a picture that had appalling possibilities, and she was certainly crying as if the worst of them had happened.

The wails seemed to come from the little pleasance where the fountain was, and Joy, as she ran, had a vision of a tree which Philip did climb with a ladder, and which he was quite capable of making Angela climb, too. The drop from his favorite limb was quite six feet.

Joy reached the pleasance first. It was Angela who

was shrieking, but the worst had not quite happened. She had wriggled herself out of the safe crotch where Philip had put her, and it was Heaven's mercy that she had not fallen. But her frock was a stout blue gingham, fortunately, and a projecting branch-stump was thrust through it, holding her in a horizontal position along the bough. She was crying and wriggling, and in another minute or so she might have fallen to the ground. There was a slight chance that she would have struck on the fountain.

Joy was up the ladder and had the child in her arms in a moment. She held her till John, reaching up from below, relieved her of the burden, and set Angela on the grass, where she continued to cry.

"Such a lot of crying about just a little hole in your frock!" remarked Philip to Angela. "I should think you'd be ashamed!"

At which Angela stopped crying.

"*Big* hole!" she said defensively, with a gulped-down sob, and began smoothing it down, where she sat on the grass.

"Angela, Angela! Oh, Angela, is my baby hurt?" cried Phyllis, flying in from the garden path outside. She had heard the child cry, from where she and Allan were in the living-room, and with a mother's instinct had fled out and down to where the child was. Allan was hurrying behind her, but before he could catch her she had caught her foot on the root that stood out

of the ground in a loop, and fallen headlong, striking her head on the edge of the marble basin.

She lay, white and still, where she had fallen. Allan was at her side in a moment, begging her to speak to him.

"Is she dead, John?" he demanded passionately of John, kneeling beside her. "Good God, man, can't you speak—is she dead?"

"She's stunned," John answered. "I think that's all."

"Her heart is beating," said her husband, with his hand on it. "I—I think it is. Oh, Phyllis, darling, won't you speak to me?"

Joy put her hand quietly on his shoulder.

"Allan," she said, "John can't do anything as long as you won't let him get near Phyllis. He can help quicker than you can."

Allan shivered a little, then raised Phyllis so that her head rested on his knee, and John could get at her.

"Do something quickly, John," he said. "I shall go crazy if she lies that way much longer. It's the first time I ever asked her for anything that she didn't give it to me—" his throat caught.

"She'll be all right in a minute, old fellow. Don't take it that way," John reassured him. "Joy, dear, run to the house and get some brandy and spirits of ammonia, and a spoon. Hurry."

Joy sped back to the house, and got the things from Lily-Anna, who unlocked and found with quick, capable hands, though she was evidently trying not to cry as she did it.

"Jus' a natural-born angel," she said. "Here, hurry back, Miss Joy. "Yas, that kind's too good to live. I might a' knowed it long ago. There's everything, child. Now go on!"

It had seemed forever to Joy, but John assured her that she had been very swift. They forced a little of the stimulant through Phyllis' teeth, and presently her color began to come back.

"There, she's coming round, Allan," said John. "You see there was no need to be so worried."

"It wasn't you," said Allan briefly, then straightway forgot everything else, as Phyllis' eyes opened.

"I'm dizzy," she said faintly. Then she saw Allan's face over hers, and farther away the others, grave and anxious, and she smiled. "Why, Allan, you poor boy, I've worried you to death. I'm—sorry—dear."

Her breath came a little hard for a moment, for it had been a bad fall; but she was nearly all right again in a few minutes more, and laughing.

"Allan, if you don't stop looking as if the world had come to an end, I shall faint again, whether I want to or not," she said. "You foolish man, didn't you ever see anything like that before?"

"The world nearly did come to an end," said Allan in a low voice.

She made no answer to this in words, but Joy saw her catch Allan's hand and hold it hard for a moment before the men helped her to rise to her feet. She was perfectly able to walk, she declared, after standing a moment and recovering from the dizziness that came over her for a moment when she got up. She went back to the house with Allan's arm around her, and the children, whom nobody had as yet taken time to scold, following, awestruck and very meek, at a safe distance behind.

"He *did* act as if the world had come to an end," mused Joy aloud. "I was frightened for a minute, though."

"You didn't show it. You were very brave and clear-headed," John told her comfortingly. . . . "I don't know that I'd have behaved very differently in his place. As he said, it wasn't I."

"Oh, was that what he meant?" said Joy. "I didn't quite know."

"Thank heaven it wasn't!" said John.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE SLIGHTLY SURPRISING CLARENCE

PHYLLIS was perfectly all right the next day. She stayed in the hammock because Allan made her, and she confessed to a shadow of a headache, but altogether, she said, her accident was worth much less fuss than was made over it. The rehearsals swept relentlessly on, past all stemming. Clarence was getting thinner under the strain, which was very becoming, and pleased him exceedingly.

Joy, too, was a little affected by the current of things. In all Clarence's off moments he was either with her or trying to be, and she could not at all make him out. If he had been anybody else she would have thought he was very much in earnest about trying to make her marry him. But, then, John, when she came to think of it, could have been described the same way. A bit of Gail's careless wisdom, dropped one day at rehearsal, gave her a clue to things. Gail had been stating to one of the teachers, who played *Fleta,* one of the leaders of the chorus, that she'd had four proposals that summer. Gail's attitude of cynical frank-

ness about her desire to collect scalps was something to make the average person gasp. She really meant it. She was, as Joy had discovered by this time, quite without malice—also quite without considerateness.

"It isn't difficult," said Gail to the stiffening teacher. "Competition is the soul of trade. If I can give the poor souls an idea that other men want me—quite flaunt them, you know—they all come bounding up to want me, too. It's very cheering, don't you think, to have a faithful hound or so about?"

Fortunately the teacher was called away by the exigencies of her part, just at that moment. Joy, who was not easily shocked by Gail, having spent nearly four weeks in her immediate vicinity now, lingered. She had an inquiring mind.

"Do you think that really is true, Gail, or were you just trying to shock Miss Archinard?" she asked.

Gail laughed, her peculiar short, low laugh, that, like everything she said and did, had something a little mocking in it. It was curiously at variance with her boyishness. You could not say she was masculine, but there was a something stripped away from her which most people class as femininenes. Joy wondered if it was softness she missed—pity, perhaps, or tenderness. She was, at least, brilliant to the last degree when she talked, though it was a perfectly useless brilliance. Gail's life had no other end than

amusing herself with whatever persons or things came her way. If they could be laughed at or employed in her service that was all she wanted.

"Shocking Miss Archinard is a pathetic sort of performance," said Gail. "Any child can do it. You doubtless do yourself. Joy, she probably thinks your coloring too vivid for ladylikeness. Why, I'm perfectly willing to shock her—it's more interesting than talking to her as an equal—but I merely told the truth. You never in the world would have robbed me of the faithful Tiddy who now crawls at your feet, if he hadn't seen John and Clarence running frantically in your direction."

That principle, it dawned on Joy, could be extended. Probably John and Clarence kept each other interested. There was a great deal to learn about men, but on the other hand, there seemed to be a few broad elementary rules to follow—if you were the kind of person who could be cold-blooded enough to follow them.

"But don't you ever feel badly when you think how they get hurt?" she asked Gail a little timidly.

"Everybody gets hurt once or twice that way," said Gail placidly. "I might as well have the satisfaction of doing it as some other girl." She looked reflectively across at her week-end man, who was just now wrestling with his solo, and obviously wanted to get back to her. "Besides—if you don't hurt *you* get hurt.

. . . Oh, I was a good, sweet, unselfish, considerate young thing once. I wasted much valuable time trying to be as nice as I could be. . . . Then *I* got hurt, and I decided that there wasn't anything in this consideration game. People seem to like me just as well now I'm perfectly selfish as they did when I wasn't."

She laughed a little again, and lifted an eyebrow imperceptibly toward Private Willis, who promptly lost a bar of his solo.

It was a difficult statement to correct without being rude. Joy let it go. For the first time in her acquaintance with Gail she had the key. She felt sorry for Gail for a moment—for that far-off childish Gail who had been so badly hurt that she hadn't ever dared let herself feel again. She did not know such a great deal about living herself, but she felt that Gail was wrong—that it was better to let things come to you and hurt you, if they would, and go on living, being a complete human being, no matter what happened to you.

Then Gail spoke again, and Joy discovered that it was difficult to go on being sorry for her—for the present her, that is.

"When you go back to your well-known grandparents," she stated with a frankness which had ceased to mislead Joy, "I shall make a final effort to ensnare John. He doesn't approve of me, but that will make

life still more exciting. You don't mind, my child, do you?"

Joy laughed.

"You may have him—if you can get him!" she answered very gallantly considering the circumstances.

What Gail said showed her something with a certainty which had been lacking before. John had never belonged to Gail. If Joy herself hadn't been so entirely in love with John she might have been made surer of him. But it is very hard to be positive of getting anything you want too intensely.

As she rested silent a moment John himself came up beside her.

"Tired, kiddie?" he said with the affectionate note in his voice that he always had when he used the little name he had for her. "You should have farmed out that sewing."

"Do you mean to say you took a bundle of those gauze frocks to do, Joy?" demanded Gail.

Joy nodded. Gail made her feel, as usual, as if she had been silly and imposed upon. The seminary girls were crowding their time as it was to get in the rehearsals, and the Principal had stated with finality that it would be impossible to give them time extra to work on their costumes. The mothers of some of them had been written home to and had responded, but some others of the girls had no one who could or

would do the sewing, so Joy had volunteered, together with Phyllis, to run up the five or six of them that had to be done. She *was* a little tired.

"I shall come over tomorrow morning and hide them," John threatened. But he smiled approvingly at her as he said it, and she knew that he liked her having done it. She knew well enough the long hours he spent with his charity patients, and all the things he did for the people in the village—things he never spoke of.

She thought with a pang that was not a selfish one of John's lot, if he did finally marry Gail. She did not think he could be happy with a girl who would never try to make him so. His mother's affection for him was irresponsible enough, but it was very real and selfless. You couldn't imagine Gail married to John.

"It'll be too late to hide them," she answered him brightly, coming out of her muse with an effort. "They're all done. There wasn't much work on them, comparatively."

"Good morrow, good mother,
Good mother, good morrow!
By some means or other,
Pray banish your sorrow!"

sang Tiddy, frisking gently up to her. "It's our turn next, Joy. Clarence says he thinks we ought to

emigrate in a body to the Opry House, and go through this thing *right.*"

John moaned.

"Clarence is always having unnecessary thoughts of that sort. To hear him talk, you would think we had spent the last two weeks going through it wrong."

"So we have," said Clarence. "Come now—all out. We are going over to rehearse on the august boards of the opera house, and then we are going home for brief bites, and then we are going back for a dress rehearsal. Tomorrow night is the night, and may the Lord have mercy on your souls!"

At this reminder Clarence's weary company bestirred itself. The principals had been rehearsing, as usual, at the Hewitt house. They were to meet the chorus, it appeared, at the village opera house, and go through the whole thing there with the orchestra of tomorrow night; a kind-hearted orchestra which was willing to rehearse twice.

"Why any of us ever began this thing, I *don't* see," growled John, as he deftly captured Joy, having made a neat flank movement which prevented Clarence from getting her. "Do you know, Joy"—he was putting her cloak on for her in the hall by this time—"I've seen about half as much of you as I would if I hadn't been lured into this. The rest of this week, after tomorrow night, you are going to have to spend exclusively in spoiling me. I'm twice as deserving as a

high-school girl, and three times as deserving as Clarence and Tiddy. And I've more right to you, besides."

"If you want rights, sometimes you have to take them," said Joy demurely.

He laughed.

"Is that a suggestion? If so, it's an excellent one. Consider yourself thoroughly taken. You are not to be discovered in corners with Clarence, nor showing Tiddy how his steps should go."

But Joy only laughed.

There was little time for discussion after that. They rehearsed steadily, with the frenzied feeling of unpreparedness that only amateurs can fully know, till it was more than time for the "brief bite" of Clarence's description. Then the choruses were shepherded over to the Hewitt house and the Maddox house respectively, and fed, Clarence and Tiddy standing over them to see that no time was wasted.

Then they went back, and went through the whole opera. The audience consisted of a few carefully chosen relatives who had insisted on being there, including the Harrington children. Phyllis was letting them see the dress rehearsal instead of the real performance, because the latter was to end with a dance, and there would have been some difficulty in tearing Philip away while things were still going on. The dress rehearsal promised to be over by nine-thirty, for

they had started at six, and were sweeping through without a break, happily unconscious that Clarence intended them to do it all over again with all the mistakes severely corrected, as soon as they had ended the final chorus.

"Gail, that isn't the way to do it," Clarence called to her sharply, as she danced in with the minimum of effort, in the "Good morrow, good mother" song that she had with Joy and Tiddy, respectively *Iolanthe* and *Strephon*. "Pick up your feet. You'll be down over that garland in the corner if you don't look out."

"I'll pick them up tomorrow night," said Gail, pausing to answer him. "No use putting all this work on rehearsal."

She was undoubtedly right. And undoubtedly the garland had no business to swing so loose, as Clarence himself afterwards admitted.

But the fact remained. As Gail stepped reluctantly back, and recommenced her song, her high-heeled slipper caught in the swinging garland, and she came down flat, with the ankle badly turned under her.

The opera stopped short while the others crowded around her and tried to find out how badly she was hurt. She sat up straight and tried to smile—Gail disliked having or showing feelings of any sort—but she was white with the pain, and when she tried to stand on the ankle it hurt her, as she admitted.

They carried her off the stage in a chair, and John,

who was donning his robes in the other dressing-room, was hurried over to see how badly she was hurt.

"Don't stop for me, Clarence," Gail ordered. "On with the dance, let Joy be unrefined. That is, if she can. I know you're hungering to lash your wretched infant-school forward."

Clarence remarked that she was plucky, patted her shoulder, and went thankfully off to put his chorus through an evolution or so while he could.

John, meanwhile, with Phyllis' help, took off the pretty pink satin slipper, with its rosette, and the pink silk stocking, and found that Gail's ankle was badly sprained. They did it up properly, and Phyllis took Gail home.

"Now what shall we do?" demanded Clarence at the end of the act, pushing the *Lord Chancellor's* wig to one side, and staring around him.

"What about Gail's guest, the one that's coming down tomorrow?" offered Tiddy.

"We have her cast, anyway," Clarence answered dolefully.

"She's played *Celia,* the one that's a sort of lieutenant-fairy, before, and I remember the time I had getting her to memorize her words—not a long part at all. She could no more play *Phyllis* than I can."

"Were you talking about the part, or about me?" asked Phyllis Harrington, coming in again.

"How is Gail?" asked everybody.

"Ask John," said Phyllis. "Her ankle seems to be hurting her badly, poor girl. I hope it will be all right tomorrow night. I made her go to bed, and her mother is sworn to make her stay there. I'll go through her part for her now, Clarence, if it will be any help."

Clarence stared at her.

"Can you?" he asked.

"Well, I know the words," said Phyllis. "And I don't think she will be able to rehearse again. It will be as much as she can do to get up tomorrow night and go through it."

John shook his head. "I'm afraid she won't be able to do even that," he said.

"Then you'll have to take the part, Phyllis!" said Clarence with a sudden decision. "Never mind dressing now. Take your hat off and see what you can do."

"Understand, I'm only holding it," said Phyllis, but she would have been more than human if she had not flushed a little with pleasure at the idea.

They began rehearsals again, and this time the opera went through with scarcely a hitch. The little chorus girls had come to adore Phyllis by this time, the boys were fond of her—there was scarcely one of the cast whom she had not helped over or through or under some one of the little hitches incident to private theatricals—and the whole cast was on its tiptoes to

see her through. There was a new feeling in the thing, that Clarence noticed directly.

"By Jove, we ought to have insisted on her doing it from the first," he told Tiddy, his lieutenant, under his breath. "I could have gotten twice as much work out of 'em.'

"Who'd have broken the news to Cousin?" he wanted to know.

Clarence eyed him with the detached interest that was his, and meditated with a certain amusement on the changeableness of college boys. Two weeks before Tiddy would have lowered his voice in reverence at Gail's name. Then he glanced across at Joy, sitting close by Phyllis in her gauzes, with her wonderful bronze-gold hair hanging around her like a mantle, and conceded within himself that it was not so surprising after all.

Sure enough, Gail was unable to bear much weight on her foot by the next day. She insisted on being dressed and driven down to the hurried last rehearsal on the afternoon of the performance. But she could not walk without support.

"You'll have to take it, Phyllis," she conceded. "I shall look as beautiful as I can, and sit in the audience and hate you."

"You ought to," said Phyllis mournfully. "I know if it were I in your place, I couldn't bear to come down and look at you."

"I have to, anyway, on account of Laura," said Gail. Miss Ward had come, and was at that moment getting out of her wraps preparatory to meeting the cast and rehearsing.

As Phyllis left her to go into the dressing-room and introduce the stranger, whom she had met, to the others, she heard Joy cry out in surprise.

"Why, I know you—at least I've seen you, only you don't remember me," Joy was saying impulsively.

Laura Ward, in the act of slipping off her coat, stopped in surprise.

"Why, I have seen *you*," she said. "Where was it?"

"I was posing for the Morrows," explained Joy. "You ran in and got some fixative. They had me for their mural decorations——"

"*Joy!*" called somebody in the tone of imperative need which is almost as summoning as a telephone bell, and Joy dashed off, holding up her green water-weeds with one hand and her draperies with the other. The meeting with Laura Ward seemed a pleasant sort of crowning to the day. She was the very same vivid, gipsy-looking girl who had dashed into the Morrow studio for a moment, and who had seemed to stand, to Joy then, for all the kinds of girl she had wanted to be and couldn't. And now she seemed just a pleasant person like oneself. Joy had caught up to her. It was like an omen.

"What is it?" she called dutifully as she ran.

She found no opportunity to see more of Miss Ward. She wanted to, for she was sure she was going to like her. She had always wanted to.

"It's a good audience," breathed Clarence over her shoulder, as they looked through peep-holes in the curtain. "All the sisters and cousins and aunts have turned up. I say, Joy, the Fairy Queen was good for ten tickets at least. There's a row of her dear ones right across from aisle to aisle."

The moment of the play had come all too swiftly, and in ten nerve-shattering minutes the curtain would go up. Ten minutes after that Joy would be rising out of a trap-door, in the character of a fairy who had spent the last twenty years at the bottom of a stream; incidentally she would be acting for the first time in her life. There was enough to be excited over; and yet it was none of these things that excited her—it was the curious note in Clarence Rutherford's voice as he spoke his trivial words in her ear.

She moved away from him automatically. She was a little tired, tonight, of his persistent flirtation. It was all very well for a while, but surely—surely, she thought, it was time he'd had enough of it; and she went back off the stage, looking, though she scarcely acknowledged it to herself, for John. She felt as if she wanted to see as much of him as she could.

He ought to have been in his dressing-room, but he

was not. He was looking for her, she almost thought, for he came quickly toward her with his face lighted.

"I'm so glad I found you before the thing commenced, kiddie," he said. "I just wanted to tell you that you're not to be frightened. Do you hear? I forbid you to be frightened." He smiled down at her protectingly. "You say you always do as I tell you—so you must this time. I know you're going to make a howling success of the opera. . . . My dear, *don't* look so worried about it all!"

They were in a little dim passage where no one was likely to come, and he drew her close to him, and kept his arm around her.

"Do I look worried?" she answered simply. "I wasn't thinking about 'Iolanthe' so much. I suppose I'm tired with rehearsals, for it seems to me as if something I didn't like was going to happen. . . . John, I never asked you before, but I feel so little and lonesome tonight, and suddenly far away from everybody. Please say that you haven't minded all the naughty things I've done—that you like me, and forgive me, and——"

"Like you and forgive you, foolish child! . . . I don't know that I like you. . . ." He looked down at her, laughingly. "And I have nothing to forgive you for. Why, Joy, it goes a great deal further than that. I thought you knew how much I cared for you."

She clung to him, there in her green and white

draperies, with her gold hair falling over them. She could scarcely believe the thing his words and voice said, but it was there to believe. She gave a little shiver and clung closer to him.

"You—care?"

"Of course I care!"

He released her enough to lift up her flushed little face, and bend down and kiss it. "You knew that a long time ago. Kiddie——"

It was just then that the call-bell rang.

She hurried to her place, her heart beating and her cheeks burning under the rouge. She was nearly sure that she had won—that the wishing ring had given her what she had asked of it. John had not said, "You and I are lovers, and we are going to be married" in so many words—but his voice—and his touch—and his laughing certainty——

She was very happy, so happy that she went through the opera in the state of some one drugged to ecstasy. She sang and danced and laughed, and helped Phyllis whenever she could in her difficult task of assuming a leading part at one day's notice, and felt as if the play had carried her into a veritable fairyland. Tiddy forgot half of his lines, the first time he spoke with her, watching her brilliant eyes and vividness, and she laughed and pulled him through. She was like a flame throughout the performance. Phyllis did wonders, considering the short time she had had in which to

prepare, and the performance generally was so good that even the people who were in it were surprised.

When it was safely over, and the dance was beginning—the dance was taking place at the Hewitt house—Joy flung herself down for a moment behind the curtains of the little alcove she knew so well by now, and caught her breath. She was hiding a little. She still had a curious reluctance to see Clarence again, and she felt as if she did not want to see John, either, for a little while. Because the next time she saw him she would probably know whether she was right or wrong. She was nearly certain she was right, but there was a little shivering possibility that she might not be. There was always Gail! . . .

"Sorcerette, dear!" said Clarence's voice wooingly in the dim doorway.

He had changed back to evening clothes, and looked very handsome, if a little theatrical, for the black was not quite yet off his brows and lashes. He, too, looked excited.

"Come out and dance, Joy of my life," he said.

"I'm—I'm waiting for John," she stammered. She still did not want to go with him.

"John's otherwise engaged," Clarence informed her coolly. "Did you think Gail intended to go without one kind word the whole evening? Not so! Come, or I'll think you mean to be highly impolite."

The same reluctance still held Joy's feet, and she did not like the insinuation, but there really seemed no way out.

"Cheer up, Sorcerette, dear," he said in her ear, as he swept her away. "'Get happy, chile, ain't you done got me?'"

She did not talk. She did not feel like it. She merely danced lightly on with Clarence, letting him say what he pleased.

"Do you remember the first time we danced together, Joy, the first time you ever danced with any one? I have always been so glad I was the first man you ever danced with."

"Why?" she asked absently. She wanted to get away, to get back to John Hewitt.

His arms tightened.

"Why? You know perfectly well why. You *have* got me—do you know it? From the very first minute I ever saw you."

She smiled up at him, and shook her head.

"You make love beautifully," she heard herself saying coolly. "But you really shouldn't make it to your host's fiancée in his house. It isn't done."

"Don't you suppose I know that?" answered Clarence tempestuously. "Joy Havenith, do you mean to say that you think I'm doing the ordinary love-making one does in any conservatory?"

She smiled a little. He was more like the Clarence

she usually knew, and she did not take it at all seriously.

"Why, you do it better than most," she said. "Go on. I like it."

If there was one thing she knew well, it was Clarence's love-making. Indeed, she had come to the point where Clarence's remarks scarcely constituted love-making at all in her eyes. They were merely his kind of manners, and she was a little tired of them.

"Good heavens! How on earth am I going to convince you?" she heard him say, with a little surprise. This was not the kind of thing he said ordinarily. "Joy, I fell in love with you, the real kind of love, the first night I saw you. You've known it all along. I wish you'd stop pretending not to—I'm getting tired of it. I want to marry you—I'd marry you tonight if you said the word. I'll come over and get you tomorrow and marry you if you'll let me. I don't suppose you will. But I do expect to keep on at you till you do. . . . "Good heaven, child, haven't you seen I was in earnest?" he broke off at the expression of her wide-open eyes.

Joy believed in love at first sight, as she had every personal reason to, but in spite of Clarence's intensity she was not quite convinced. She looked up at him. He was white, and his mouth was tense. And he was holding her like a vise. He *was* in earnest.

"Maybe—maybe you think you do mean it now,"

she said breathlessly. "If you do—I'm sorry for you. It isn't nice to be in love unless the other person is, too."

"What do you know about it?" he burst out angrily. "You aren't in love with that virtuous citizen of yours, whether or not he is with you. Let him go back to Gail. She's been considering one of her tame cats for a year, and she'd about decided to marry him when you came along and broke it up. You'd sweep any man off his feet. You and I belong together, Joy darling. I'm going to marry you, if you were engaged to the whole College of Surgeons."

"The dance is over," said Joy a little faintly.

"Then come over here where it's quiet. I haven't finished."

"Oh, please no—" cried Joy, freeing herself from his hold eagerly. This was getting unexpectedly like earnest, and it had been a shock. She did not want to hear any more about how Clarence felt.

She hurried across the floor without waiting for him, to where Allan and Phyllis were still standing together. They had stolen a dance with each other—they danced together altogether too much for married people, anyway, Mrs. Hewitt said.

The atmosphere of happiness and serenity that was about Phyllis was something Joy could always rest in thankfully. Her own moods alternated so that Phyllis' calmness was an especial comfort.

"I—I'm so tired," she said wistfully. "Couldn't we go soon?"

"I should think we could," said Phyllis willingly, while Allan seconded the motion with joy.

"There's no place like home," he said. "I've been considering the fact that it was getting on for four, and that I have an appointment at ten tomorrow, for a half-hour. Go get your wraps, Phyllis, my darling, and I'll get John, as my share of the bargain. We'll be awaiting you happily in a dark corner of the porch."

Joy wanted to flee from Clarence. And she looked forward happily to being with John on the back seat of the motor, and talking over the evening with him. She would learn, perhaps, just what he had meant when he had seen her last. Her heart beat hard with the excitement of the thought. She was nearly sure—dear wishing ring!

She slipped off, after speaking to Mrs. Hewitt, and saw Allan and John moving off together to the men's cloak-room.

She sang softly to herself as she put on her cloak. She would be with John again in a moment. He had smiled at her as he passed out of sight. What were Clarences and such small things? This was a wonderful world.

She and Phyllis came down the stairs together as unobtrusively as they could, so as not to betray to the

rest that they were going. She had forgotten about Gail.

But Gail was the first thing she saw—half-lying on a couch in a dark corner of the hall, holding court with Laura Ward. There were two or three men around them, and they were laughing and talking together. Joy waved her hand as they passed, and Gail looked up from her laughter.

"Farewell, my dears, until tomorrow! Good-by, Joy. It was a well-done opera, even if I was sitting in the audience being fiendishly jealous. . . . Oh, I forgot to tell you that I have learned your dark secret, my child! I think you're the most ingenious little wretch that ever lived. Till tomorrow! I'm going to give a tea—be prepared!"

She looked at Laura Ward and laughed again.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE GIFT OF THE RING

Joy had no idea in the world how she got into the car. John's guiding hand on her arm probably was all that saved her from stumbling into the hedge, or trying to walk up a tree, she thought afterwards. She was on the back seat, finally, with John by her. She laid her head back with a little tired half-moan, and felt John's strong, comforting arm drawing her over so that she could rest against his shoulder.

"You poor little girl, you're all worn out," she heard him say tenderly. "But I was proud of you, little Joy. I didn't know what a wonderful person I had found. . . . Little fairy princess!"

Ten minutes earlier the note of affection and pride in his voice would have made Joy so deliriously happy that she wouldn't have known what to do. But . . . Gail knew . . . Gail knew all about it all! . . . How could men! And she had said she was going to give a tea. That probably meant that she was going to tell everybody everything, and laugh about it.

She *was* tired, and the shock of Gail's words had

taken all the capacity for action out of her. She knew that if she'd had any proper feelings she would have moved coldly away from John, and accused him of betraying her to Gail, and demanded why he had done it. Evidently she had no proper feelings. You can't have, if you love people hard. She merely lay against John's strong, broad shoulder that felt so alive and comforting, and thought that this was the last time she would ever lean against it, or feel, as she always did when he touched her, as if there was some one who would look after her, and stand between her and every one else. She could not talk.

When they reached the Harrington house Allan took the car around to the garage at the back, himself, and Phyllis said she would stay in the car with him while he locked the garage. The men began to tease her for the idea she had offered, but Joy, hearing Phyllis laughingly defend herself, and explain what she really meant, knew that it was Phyllis' way of giving John a chance to say good-night to her alone.

"Dear Phyllis!" she thought, with a gush of gratitude in her heart that there was one person in the world so unfailingly thoughtful and honest and dependable. The world did not quite go down in ruins while Phyllis stood her friend.

"Dear Phyllis!" she heard John's gay voice say, as if in echo of her own thoughts. "She knew I'd want a chance to see you alone a minute. . . . .What

an awful amount of people too many there are in the world, aren't there, kiddie? I'm beginning to think with yearning of Crusoe's isle, and a barbed-wire fence around that."

He drew her into the shadow of the vines on the porch, and took her in his arms. . . . And he had told Gail . . . oh, how *could* men?

For a moment she stood, passive. Then the nearness of him, and the cruel last-timeness of it all, swept over her again, and she threw her arms around his neck convulsively, and kissed him over and over again. She wanted it to remember.

"Good-by, my dearest!" she whispered.

"Not good-by, dear—good-night!" he answered her. "It's a long time till tomorrow, but thank goodness, it's coming. And all the tomorrows after that."

"No—" she started to say, when she heard footsteps, and John released her.

"It's a very dark night," said Allan sadly. "I couldn't see my best friend, even if he were on my own porch. Coming in, John?"

"Allan, you have the tact of Talleyrand, or whoever it was they used to kick," responded John amiably. "No, I can't come in. It's at least four o'clock, and I have to be up at seven tomorrow. I'll drop in some time in the morning—you won't have a chance to miss me."

He said good-night to them all, and went down from

the porch. They could hear him whistling "With Strephon for Your Foe" joyously down the path, and, more dimly, down the road that led to his house.

"There goes, I should say, a fairly happy man," remarked Allan to the world at large. "Now, Joy, if any one asked you, what would you say made him so contented with life?"

Joy liked Allan's brotherly teasing as a rule, but tonight it seemed as if she could not answer him, or anybody. She did not feel as if she could talk any more, and looked appealingly at Phyllis.

"She's dead to the world, Allan," Phyllis interposed. "And if we stay down here talking those imps of ours are going to wake up and demand tribute."

"Great Scott, they are!" said Allan, "and the buns and stuff you held Mrs. Hewitt up for are in the bottom of the car, locked up in the garage—where *you* wanted to be."

"Which is providential," said the children's mother thankfully. "It's an alibi. They can't get any till tomorrow, no matter how much we want to give them any."

So they tiptoed up the stairs. Joy turned off into her own room, but she heard enough to know that no soft-footedness had availed. She heard Philip's clear, deliberate little voice demanding, "How much party

did you bring me home, Mother?" and the hopeful patter of Angela's feet.

She shut her door tight before she knew how it turned out. She had a good deal to do, because she was going to have to take a train that got her away from Wallraven before John found time from his rounds to come back next morning. Gail might have told Mrs. Hewitt—any number of people—by this time. She did not want to see any of them again. And she loved them all very much.

She took off her frock with slow, careful fingers, and put on a kimono to pack in. Her trunk was against the wall. As she worked steadily over the tissue-paper and hangers and things to be folded, she thought she was beyond feeling anything at all, till she felt something wet on her face, and found that she was crying silently, without having known it in the least.

The green and silver frock—the white top-coat—that had burrs on it, where she had gotten out by the roadside to pick some goldenrod, and John had not gotten them all quite off—the little blue dress with the fichu that John had said made her look as if she belonged in a house instead of a story-book—the gray silk she had loved so, and worn so hard it was middle-aged-looking already—the brown wool jersey suit she must travel in——

She laid this last across a chair, and tried to go on

packing. That was the frock she had worn when John came to her in the woods, and was so kind, and so good, and told her he would let her have her happy month. . . . Well, she'd had it. And it was worth it—it was worth anything!

But she put her head down on the side of the trunk and sobbed and sobbed.

Presently she went on with her packing, and finished it by a little after four-thirty. The suitcase had to be filled. When it was done she took a bath and dressed, and lay down on the bed as she was. There was a train at nine-ten, that got her back home late in the afternoon, and she was taking no chances.

She slept a little, always with the nine-ten train on her mind, and finally rose and locked her trunk at half-past seven. She put the key and her ticket and what money she had in her hand-bag, fastened on her cap, took her suitcase, and stole downstairs. Nobody was astir yet but Lily-Anna, and Viola, who was giving the early-waking Angela her breakfast in an informal way in the corner of the kitchen.

"Could I have a cup of coffee in a little while now, Lily-Anna?" she asked the cook, who was making beaten biscuit in an echoing fashion that would have penetrated any but the thick hundred-year-old walls of the kitchen.

"Why, Miss Joy—you goin' off on a ride with Dr. Johnny this early?" inquired Lily-Anna, thinking the

natural thing. "Course you can. I'll make it right now. An' I'll tell Mis' Harrington."

Joy had forgotten Phyllis in her wild desire for flight. But she remembered now. She would have to call Phyllis and tell her. Indeed, she would rather tell her herself than have Gail know. She couldn't go off this way, as if she was taking the silver with her.

She retraced her steps up the stairs, opened the door of Phyllis' room softly. Phyllis' bed was near the door, and she sat up at the slight noise. Joy beckoned to her, and she slipped out of bed, flinging around her a blue kimono that lay across the footboard and setting her feet noiselessly in slippers as she came out with the swift, gliding step that was characteristic of her. She gathered back the loose masses of her amber-colored hair and flung them over her shoulder, shut the door softly in order not to disturb Allan, and followed Joy down the hall.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. "Telephone at this unchristian hour?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you," Joy answered, "but I had to. Where can we go where I can talk to you for half an hour—or maybe ten minutes?"

There was a glowing fire in the living-room, and, of old custom, a long couch stood before it. Phyllis led the way downstairs to this, and established Joy on it, drawing a chair up to it herself.

"Now tell me all about it," she said comfortingly. "And lie down, child—you look dead."

But Joy was too nervous to lie down.

"I have to go away on the nine-ten," she said. . . . "No, please, Phyllis, wait till I tell you, and you'll see I do. You would, too."

Phyllis always took the least nerve-wearing way—you could count on her for that. She listened encouragingly.

"Gail said last night she—she knew my dark secret," Joy began nervously in the middle. "And you know Gail does tell anything about anybody she wants to, especially if she thinks it makes a funny story,—sometimes I think perhaps she likes making people ridiculous. . . . She doesn't care about feelings. . . ."

"Why, you poor child, have you a dark secret?" asked Phyllis, smiling. "Let me hear the worst. I promise to love you still."

"Oh *please* do!" implored Joy. She dropped her head on the couch cushions and talked with her face hidden on one arm. "Phyllis, I—I never was engaged to John!"

The bombshell did not at all have the effect she had expected.

"I'm sorry to contradict you, but you certainly are," said Phyllis placidly.

"You don't understand," went on Joy, coming out from her shelter. "Listen."

So she told Phyllis, with both her quivering little hands locked in one of Phyllis' strong, firm ones, the whole story—the story of the shut up, youthless life among the people who came to give her grandfather homage, and regarded her as a plaything or a stage-property, and of how she had seen the two young lovers one wet day, and been stirred into a wild rebellion for a youth of her own.

"I understand," said Phyllis here. "You were 'half-sick of shadows.' I went through that myself. There comes a time when you'd do *anything.*"

"You understand?" asked Joy with wide eyes, "you with a husband that adores the ground you walk on?"

"I do understand," affirmed Phyllis, with her mind flying back for a moment to a gray February day in a Philadelphia library—a day that was eight years old now. "I think I can understand anything you are going to tell me."

But Joy went on to the day when she had hidden on the stairs to get away from the people, and John had come in, with the light glinting on his hair, and catching in the ring on his finger.

"I suppose I fell in love with him then, though I didn't know what it was," Joy confessed. "And when I met you and Philip and Allan I loved you all so, too,

and it seemed so queer you liked me—just me, you know, not somebody's granddaughter that he used for trimmings!"

"Who wouldn't?" said Phyllis matter-of-factly. "So far as I can see, most people are crazy over you."

"And Grandfather wouldn't let me go unless I'd been engaged—or he said that was the only reason—he thought I couldn't be, of course. And—and it flew out. And I used John's name when he cornered me, because I remembered him, and how kind he'd been. And on top of that——"

"And on top of that John turned up! Good gracious!" said Phyllis. She could not help a little laugh but her face sobered swiftly. "*Think* of that man's cleverness and self-control! Why—why, Joy, no man would do all that unless he cared for you a little, anyhow."

"John would," said Joy with conviction. "You know how he is about honor and courtesy and doing things for people."

Phyllis nodded. That was an incontrovertible fact.

"And he's told Gail," Joy went on. "That's the only secret I ever had in my life, so it *must* be that. So I'm going to run away. I simply can't stay and . . ."

"Told Gail! Ridiculous!" cried Phyllis. "Unless . . . unless——"

"Unless there was some understanding between

them before and John was simply overchivalrous when he helped me," Joy finished steadily. "Yes, that's the only answer. . . . I'm going. Please don't forget me."

"You foolish child!"

"There's another reason," Joy added. "Clarence proposed last night. I'd be almost sure to say 'yes' to save my face about the other thing, if I stayed, and I might have to marry him if I did. . . . Queer that Clarence, that I and everybody knew was just a plain flirt, should really want to, and John not!" she added absently. "Good-by."

She was off the couch and had hurried out of doors, where Phyllis, half-clad as she was, could not follow her.

Phyllis rose and went to the door, but the little slim brown figure was already going swiftly toward the station, her suitcase swinging in her hand.

It occurred to Phyllis as she walked over to the telephone that usually crises found her clad in a blue negligee of some sort. Then she got Dr. Hewitt's number.

"Is that you, John Hewitt?" she called. "Come over to this house this moment! . . . Yes, something serious *has* happened. And don't ask for Allan—ask for me. I'll be on the porch waiting for you if I can. If not, stay there and wait for me. This is private—and—yes, about Joy! Come!"

Joy got the train with a desolately long interval of waiting at the station. It was a day-coach. She had all the time in the world to think things out. Her grandparents were back in the city house, she knew. They would be glad to see her in their different ways, she knew that, too. She could drop into her niche noiselessly, with scarcely a question from Grandfather, and all the lovingness in the world from Grandmother, except if Grandfather needed attention. The old gowns were still in her closet. . . . *When she got home it would be reception day!*

As this recollection forced itself on her she felt her heart sink lower than it had been before. All the tormenting memories in the world—and Grandfather would make her dress and be there. . . .

She clasped her hands involuntarily, and felt on the left one the pressure of the wishing ring. She had meant to take it off and leave it with Phyllis, and she had forgotten to.

"There isn't much left to wish," she thought. She clasped her hands tighter over it. "Nothing much—but to get to sleep for a little while, and dream it isn't so. I—I suppose I can do that without a wish."

She tried very hard, and she had only had about three hours of sleep that night, not to speak of a most exciting evening before it. She really thought in her heart that she couldn't sleep, but she laid her head back against the hot red velvet of the seat, and actually

did sleep dangerously near the time to change cars. She got a chair-car after that, but, having got into the way of it, drowsed again. She woke up from a dream that John was coming down the aisle, only Gail was somewhere outside with a rope around his arms, and was going to pull him back in a minute, to find that she was at the journey's end. She had only her suit-case to gather up. She had not even asked Phyllis to send her trunk. Well, Phyllis would, anyway.

The old house was just the same. She thought irrepressibly, as she came slowly up the steps, about the little boy who ran away from home, and when he came back after four hours, fidgeted a while, and then said off-handedly, "Well, I see you have the same old cat!" She knew exactly how that small boy had felt.

"The same old cats!" she said half-aloud as three plump, velvet-upholstered ladies ambled down the steps, and passed her without knowing her. Then she checked her mind in its careering. "I mustn't get Gailish, even if I am unhappy," she reminded herself. "That's the sort of thing she'd say."

Old Elizabeth was in the hall, in attendance, as usual. Joy flung her arms round her impulsively and kissed her. It was good to see her again, and to know that she didn't know any terrible things about her having commandeered a lover that really belonged to somebody else.

"Oh, Miss Joy, Miss Joy dear!" said old Elizabeth. "How good you got here in time for the reception! And it's good to see you, too. Run up and git into some pretty clothes like your grandpa likes, and go right into the parlor."

Joy smiled a little as she obeyed old Elizabeth. It seemed queer, and yet natural, to come back and slip into her old place as a minor figure in the old unbreakable routine. She had been a real person with a major part to play, all these weeks at Wallraven. . . . But it was rather a comfort, now, to feel that it didn't matter to anybody what you did, as long as Grandfather was pleased. And she felt as if she was willing to be a whole row of parlor bric-a-brac, she was so meek and so tired and unhappy.

It was the amber satin she had rebelled so against that she took out of her suitcase deliberately and put on. It was tight across the chest, and actually a little short for her—she had *grown*, really grown in the active open-air weeks she had been away. She was tanned, too, she found when the yellow dress was on, and there was a freckle on the back of one little white hand. She braided her hair in the old way and went down to the long parlors, back to the autographed pictures and framed letters, and Grandfather, benignantly great at the end of the room.

Grandmother was very glad to see her. They snatched a minute in a dark corner before they had to

go on seeing guests. Joy found herself going up and down the room saying courteous things to people in just the old way. They were not surprised to see her. Perhaps they had scarcely noticed that she had been away.

"It's the same old cat—I've only been away three hours," she reminded herself with a little rueful smile. Then she saw a shy-looking couple over in the corner, and went over, to try to put them at ease. . . . She wouldn't have thought about people being shy or needing putting at ease before she went away! . . .

"Something *has* happened to me," thought Joy. Then she thought what it was. Why, she was doing the way John would have done—thinking about other people's feelings, not her own, for one minute. It felt warm in her heart. She had that for a keepsake from John, anyway.

But she found she was making a mistake to think about John. After a half-hour of moving about the long parlors she fled. The little dark place in the back hall was just the same. Six weeks, naturally, had not altered it.

She sat down on the bottom step in a little heap, with her face in her hands, under Aunt Lucilla's triumphant picture. She remembered it above her, but she did not want to look at it.

"I wish you hadn't egged me on, Aunt Lucilla," she said most unfairly from between her hands.

She did not know how long she had sat there, when she heard a little squeak, and looked up with her heart jumping. It sounded like the squeak doors make that haven't been opened for—say—six weeks or two months. . . .

There in the ray of light from the chandelier in the room behind, the light glinting on his fair curly hair, he stood as he had stood before, the wishing-ring man.

For a moment Joy thought she was seeing something that wasn't so. Then she looked down. The ring was on her finger still, not on his. And he was not a vision. He was a human man, a man she knew and loved. And he did not smile at her this time, as the vision would have done, in a quizzical, stranger-friendly fashion, and stand still. He was over at her side in one swift step, and he had both her hands tight, as if they belonged to him, and he was talking to her in a loving, scolding voice, as people only talk to you when you belong to them and they to you.

"Joy! You very naughty little girl, to run away this way!"

For a minute she only wanted to cling to his hands and tell him how glad—how glad she was to see him, and how nothing else in the whole beautiful world mattered at all. But she remembered she mustn't.

"You told Gail. You might have known she'd shame me before everybody if she could. She doesn't care. . . . Oh, John, how could you?"

She held on to him hard for comfort even while she was reproaching him.

He looked down at her in the half-light, then, as if he was fairly content with what he saw in her face, closed the door behind him. They could still see each other enough to talk.

"Next time give me a little more benefit of the doubt, my dear. *I never told Gail anything!*"

When John told you anything it was so. That was all there was to *that*. She gave a gasp of blessed relief.

"But—" she protested. "But Gail knew——"

He sat down on the step below her.

"But Gail didn't know anything! Gail never will know anything. Nobody ever will but you and I and Phyllis Harrington, who is much safer than a church. But it did take a certain amount of diplomacy to extract from Gail exactly what she said to you that frightened you into another state—or rather what she meant by it."

He was smiling now. Could it possibly be——

"I went to Gail as soon as Phyllis had called me up and had had it out with me—which, I may add, she did rather severely," he went on calmly, though he still held one hand as if he was afraid Joy would vanish again. "And Gail said——"

He stopped provokingly, and Joy held her breath.

"Well, I won't torment you, though I am inclined

to think you deserve it. It appears that Gail had learned from that friend of hers, Laura Ward, to whom she had spoken of you and your people, that you posed as a model for a couple of artists, just before you left this city, in order to earn money for gowns. The girl lived in the same studio building with them . . . their name was Morrow, I think. She was under the impression that you were a professional model till the Morrows explained, and you had struck her as such a very good type that she remembered you and the whole episode. Gail was teasing you about it, as she teases every one. She has a provocative, half-mocking manner that she lets go too far sometimes. I'm not inclined to forgive her for tormenting my little girl."

Joy gave a long sigh of relief.

"Then—you're not engaged to Gail?"

He gave the hands he held a little half-impatient, half-loving shake.

"Would I have asked you to marry me under those circumstances?"

"You never asked me to marry you," said Joy in a subdued voice. She felt as if the world were coming down around her ears. "I was a trial fiancée, and a good deal of a trial at that, as you said. And—you only did it to oblige me, and—and I'm very much obliged and—and hadn't you better go?"

If he stayed much longer——

His voice, that had been light, became more tender and more serious.

"Joy, do you think I could see much of you without caring for you? When I first met you I took you for a child, and there was so much of the child about you afterwards that, when I yielded to an impulse and helped you out of your dilemma I scarcely knew I was in love with you. But it didn't take me long after that to find it out. And my only fear was that you were going through it all in the same childlike spirit, that you couldn't care for me. But when I asked you if you belonged to me, and you said—do you remember? 'You always were human—for me'—why—" his voice became happier again, for she had not drawn away, "why, I thought I was asking you to marry me. And I thought you were saying you would. But if you weren't. . . . *Don't* you care, Joy? *Aren't* you mine? It doesn't seem as if you could be any one else's."

His voice broke.

She bent down, where she sat above him. Her voice was very happy and very tender.

"But I always was, John. Always, from the first minute you opened the door there, and looked at me, and spoke. I—I expect I always shall be."

Neither of them spoke for a while after that. Presently John held her off and looked at her, and laughed a little.

"Well, what?" demanded Joy peacefully. She didn't much care what, but she wanted to know. "And Elizabeth sometimes brushes under these stairs when receptions are over. She may find us."

"I shall be delighted to meet Elizabeth," said John with his usual calm. "But it merely occurred to me that it wasn't so much that you belonged to me as that I belonged to you. I'm not sure that you're entirely a human being yet. And I don't think I shall trust you any longer with that wishing ring."

She slipped it off very seriously and gave it to him.

"I would only wish that you should have everything you wanted," she said. "I did, you know."

He slid it back on the finger it was so much too large for. "I'll get you an honest-to-goodness one, too," he said. "But you'd better keep it. I *have* everything I wanted."

He drew her head down and kissed her in demonstration of the fact.

"But I do think it was the ring that did it," said little Joy.

THE END

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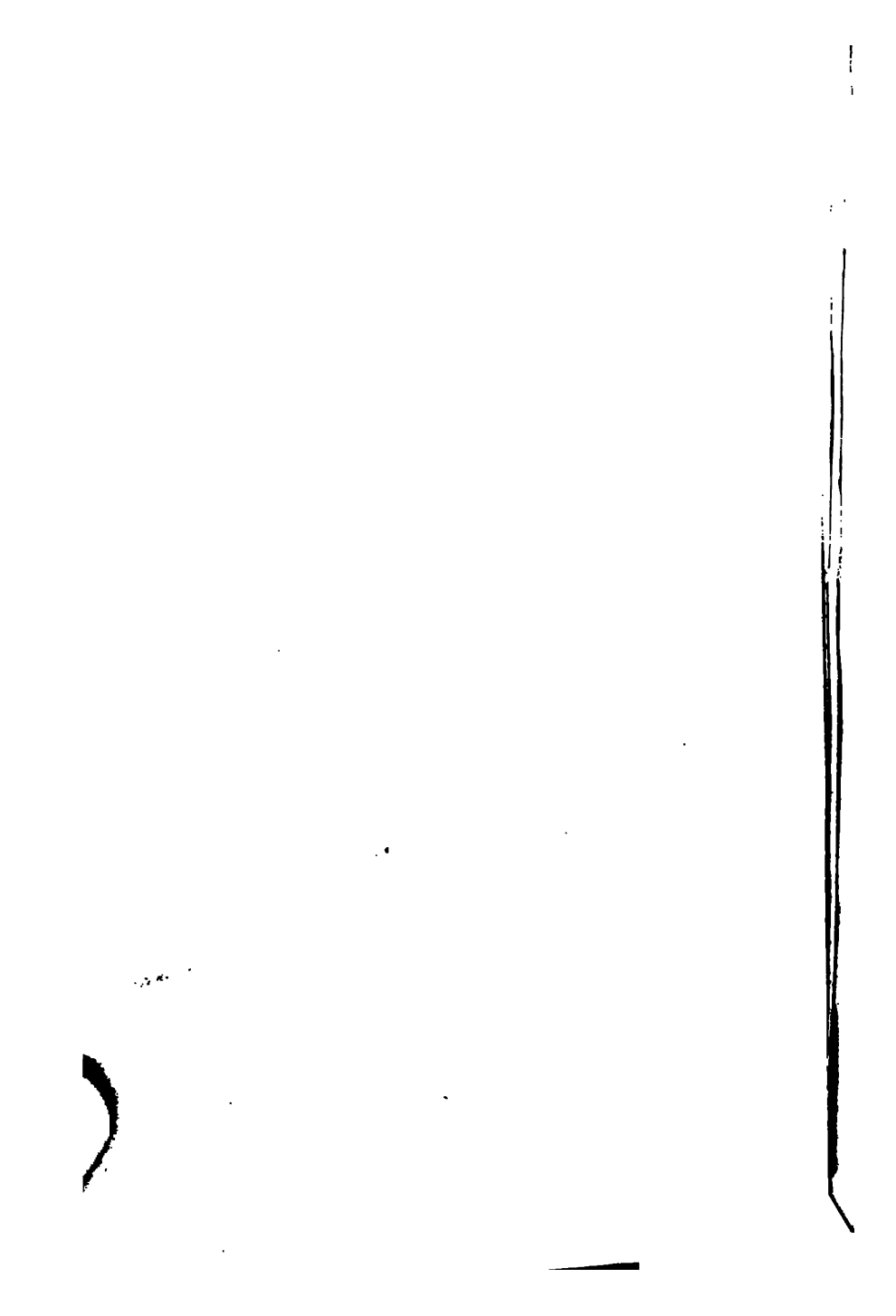
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